



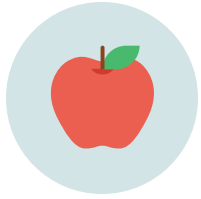
# LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE

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APRIL 28, 2021**

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**Azle News**  **The Springtown Epigraph** 





**NUTRITION**

**Protein, carbs and fat**



A nutritious diet is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. When paired with physical activity, a nutritious diet can serve as the foundation for a long, healthy life.

A nutritious diet is a building block of a healthy lifestyle, and no healthy diet is complete without protein, carbohydrates and fat.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics defines nutrition as how food affects the health of the body. Food provides nutrients that are vital for survival. Food is made up of macronutrients like protein, carbohydrates and fat, each of which play different roles in promoting short- and long-term health.

- Protein: Protein pro-

vides the body with amino acids that are essential for growth and development. The amino acids found in protein also help the body maintain itself and help body tissue recover after certain activities, including exercise. Protein also plays a vital role in immune system function, helping the body to fight inflammation and infection. The AND notes that beef, pork, chicken, game and wild meats, fish, seafood, eggs, soybeans, and other legumes are great protein sources.

- Carbohydrates: Carbohydrates do for the body what gasoline does for an automobile. Carbs provide the body with the energy it needs to func-

tion at peak capacity. The carbs found in foods like whole grains, rice, potatoes, bread, and more deliver sugars and starches that provide the carbs the body needs for energy. That energy is vital when moving around during the day, but it's also essential when the body is at rest, as it ensures the heart continues to beat and facilitates digestion.

- Fat: The dietary fat found in oils, nuts, milk, cheese, and other foods provides structure to cells and prevents damage to cell membranes. The AND also notes that oils and fats absorb fat-soluble vitamins like vitamin A, which is vital for healthy eyes and lungs.



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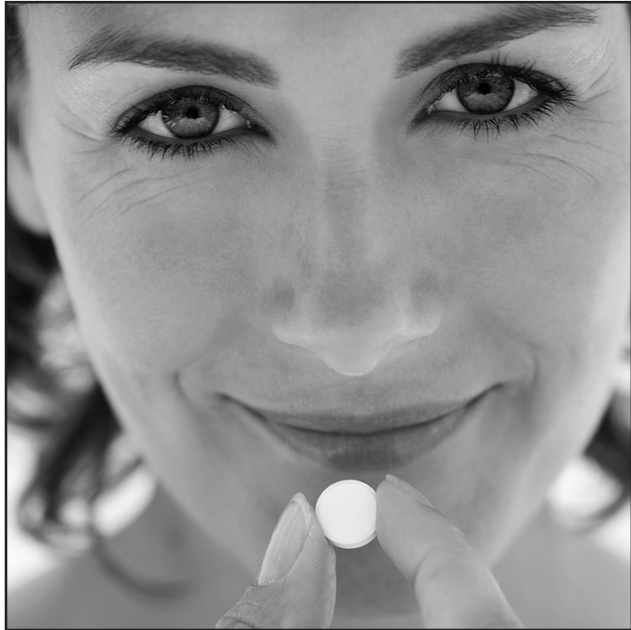
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**VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS**

# Vitamins and supplements women need



A balanced diet does more than provide sustenance and fuel for daily life. Eating an array of healthy foods gives people the best opportunity to naturally obtain the vitamins and minerals needed for optimal health. But certain nutrients may be lacking even when a diet includes an assortment of colorful produce and a careful mix of proteins, carbohydrates and fats. The right supplements can help overcome such deficits, and women often need different supple-

mentation than their male counterparts.

Vitamins geared toward women are not just a marketing ploy; most contain formulations that cater to women's unique needs at various stages in life. The Office on Women's Health and WebMD recommends these vitamins for women to maintain good health.

**VITAMIN D**

The Cleveland Clinic reports that 42 percent of Americans are vitamin D deficient. Vitamin D comes from diet but also

is produced in the skin when the body is exposed to sunlight. Vitamin D helps the body absorb and maintain adequate levels of calcium and phosphate, which are essential to bone health. Rush University Medical Center says recent research suggests vitamin D may help guard against severe COVID-19 infections. Some populations have higher levels of vitamin D deficiency, particularly people of color, those with inflammatory bowel diseases and post-menopausal women.

**FOLIC ACID**

Folic acid or folate (also known as vitamin B9) helps the body make blood cells and the DNA for new cells. This B vitamin also is key to preventing birth defects like spina bifida. According to the March of Dimes, one in two pregnancies are unplanned, and adequate folic acid is required at the early stages of gestation to help the fetus develop healthfully. All women who are sexually active are advised to take a multivitamin that contains folic acid in concentrations of 400-800 mcg. In addition, folate can be found in dark, green, leafy vegetables, nuts, beans, and cereals with added folic acid.

**VITAMIN B12**

Vitamin B12 comes mostly from animal products. Therefore, anyone who follows a vegetarian or vegan diet may need supplementation to ensure they are getting enough B12. Pregnant women will find B12 is important for baby's development. Without it, the infant may have low birth weight or other health problems, advises the OWH. Vitamin B12 also helps produce healthy red blood cells, may support bone health, could reduce risk of macular degeneration, and may reduce symptoms of depression. After age 50, women's bodies cannot absorb vitamin B12 as readily, so supplementing or eating fortified foods can help.

**CALCIUM**

Growing girls need 1,300 mg of calcium each day to develop strong bones for adulthood. After menopause, women may need nearly the same dosage (1,200 mg) to help slow the bone loss that comes with aging. Calcium is found in low-fat dairy products and foods with calcium added.

Healthy eating may be a goal, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration notes that 99 out of 100 Americans don't meet even minimum standards of a balanced diet. Supplementation can help meet those standards and ensure a long, healthy life.

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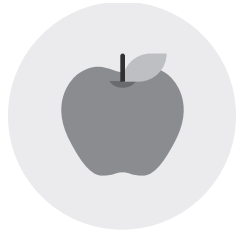
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## NUTRITION

# The basics of soyfoods

A nutritious diet is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. When overhauling their diets with a goal on improving their overall health, adults may consider a host of new foods. That's when soyfoods first find their way on to many people's radars.

## WHAT ARE SOYFOODS?

Soyfoods are foods made from soybeans, a legume that the Cleveland Clinic notes is an excellent source of high quality protein. That distinguishes soybeans from many other legumes.

## DOES SOY PROMOTE HEART HEALTH?

The connection between soy protein and heart health has been studied at length, and organizations such as

the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have re-evaluated their stance on soy protein and its link to heart health. In 1999, the FDA authorized a health claim for soy protein that suggested it could reduce a person's risk for heart disease. However, the FDA ultimately concluded that the studies on which it based its 1999 authorization were inconsistent and inconclusive, leading the FDA to downplay the relationship between soy proteins and heart health until further research could be conducted.

## DO SOYFOODS HEALTHY?

Though the effects of soyfoods on heart health may or may not be as significant as researchers once suggested, soyfoods can still make for

nutritious additions to a healthy diet. The health care experts at the University of California San Francisco Health note that the following foods that contain soy provide a variety of nutritional benefits.

- **Edamame:** Edamame is a dish of green soybeans that are boiled or steamed in their pods. UCSF Health notes that edamame are high in protein and fiber and do not contain any cholesterol.

- **Tofu:** WebMD notes that tofu is made by pressing curdling soy milk into a solid block. Tofu has been linked to lower risk for various diseases, including osteoporosis. Tofu contains plant estrogens, and women's estrogen levels go down after menopause, leading to

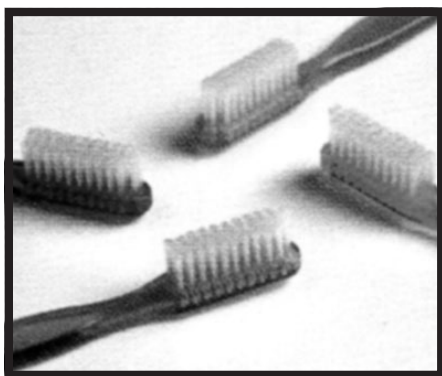
a loss of bone mass that makes them vulnerable to osteoporosis. According to WebMD, plant estrogens in tofu can make up for some of the estrogen drop-off related to menopause.

- **Soymilk:** Soy milk is produced when soybeans are soaked, ground fine and strained. The resulting fluid is soybean milk. UCSF Health notes that unfortified soy milk is an excellent source of high quality protein and B vitamins. However, unfortified soy milk lacks calcium and vitamin D, both of which are found in traditional milk. Fortified soy milk contains both calcium and vitamin D.

Some additional foods made from soybeans include tempeh, soy nuts and miso. Each provides their own nutritional benefits.



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**WEIGHT LOSS**

# Safe ways to lose weight

The first step in safe weight loss is to visit a doctor and let him or her know your plans. The doctor can help determine if a specific eating plan or exercise routine is safe based on your current health. Certain medications can affect metabolism and even contribute to weight gain, so a discussion with the doctor can help ensure people aren't putting their health in jeopardy when their goal is to get healthy.

It's also vital that people trying to lose weight do not believe everything they read online. Research published in The American Journal of Public Health in October 2014 found that most people who search the internet for tips on how to lose weight come across false

or misleading information on weight loss, particularly in regard to how quickly they can shed some pounds. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises the safest amount of weight to lose per week is between one and two pounds. People who lose more per week, particularly on fad diets or programs, oftentimes are much more likely to regain weight later on than people who took more measured approaches to losing weight. In addition, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics notes it is better to lose weight gradually because if a person sheds pounds too fast, he or she can lose muscle, bone and water instead of fat.

The calories in, calories out concept is something

to keep in mind when attempting to lose weight. But metabolism and other factors, including body composition and physical activity levels, also are factors. How well one's body turns calories into fuel also needs to be considered. The best ways to experiment are to start slowly.

- Calculate the average daily calories consumed in a day using a tracker. This can be a digital app on a phone or simply writing down calories on a piece of paper. Track over a few days and see, on average, how many calories you've been consuming.

- Notice extra calories. Many diets can be derailed by eating extra calories that you don't realize you're consuming. That cookie a coworker

insists you eat or the leftover mac-and-cheese from your toddler's plate can be sources of extra calories. Be mindful of what's being consumed, including sweetened beverages.

- Explore the science. According to the Scotland-based health service NHS Inform, one pound of fat contains 3,500 calories on average. Cutting calorie intake by 500 calories per day should see you lose 1 pound per week. The same goes in the other direction. Eating 500 more calories per day for a year can result in gaining close to 50 pounds. Small changes really add up.

- Eat filling foods. Choose low-calorie, high quality foods, like vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Meals that



provide satiety can help eliminate between-meals snacks that can derail your weight loss efforts.

- Seek support as a way to create accountability. Share weight loss plans with a friend or relative who can help monitor your progress and keep you on track.

- Incorporate strength training. Good Housekeeping says the more lean muscle you have,

the faster you can slim down. Start slowly with strength training, using free weights or body weights. Aim for strength workouts three to four times per week and alternate with calorie-blasting cardio.

Explore safer ways to lose weight, including taking a gradual approach that promotes long-term weight loss.

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## HEALTH

# Healthy resolutions that are easy to keep

Even with the best intentions, resolutions have historically proven hard to keep. Simplifying health-based resolutions can lead to a higher success rate and a healthier you.

- Walk more. It is easy to get preoccupied with the '10,000 steps per day' mantra that many people follow and that certain fitness trackers promote. Walking 10,000 steps daily, which equates to roughly five miles per day, is a healthy goal, but it may not be realistic for everyone. Take stock of how many steps you currently take each day, and then resolve to walk 2,000 more. As your body acclimates to walking more, add another 2,000 steps, continuing to do so until you reach 10,000 steps.

- Learn something new about being healthy. Informed health decisions

require gaining a greater understanding of your body. Rely on a reputable source such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to learn more about how to be healthy.

- Spend less time on social media. Staring at your phone or tablet for multiple hours browsing tweets or checking messages might not be the best thing for your physical and mental health. Browsing the internet may take up time that could be better spent engaging in physical activity. According to Dr. Elia Abi-Jaoude, a staff psychiatrist at the Hospital for Sick Children and Toronto Western Hospital, various studies have shown how excessive social media usage can adversely affect relationships, sense of self, sleep, academic performance, and emotional well-being.

- Eat more whole foods. Whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and fish, contain various nutrients the body needs to function at peak capacity. These foods may help reduce the risk of many diseases and help people maintain healthy body weights. Start slowly by introducing a new whole food to your diet each day. A gradual approach is more manageable than going on a drastic diet.

- Avoid sweetened beverages. You are what you eat, but also what you drink. A report published in 2006 in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, particularly carbonated soft drinks, may be a key contributor in the epidemic of overweight and obesity. Skip sweetened beverages (even fruit

juices can be unhealthy if consumed in excess) and opt for more water or unsweetened teas.

- Find a physical activity you like. Rather than resolving to join the gym or signing up for a 5K because it's what everyone is doing, find a physical activity you truly enjoy and aim to do it a few times a week. Maybe it's a sport like tennis or recreational cycling with the family. But if the idea of a gym membership excites you, then by all means sign up.

Avoid restrictive health and wellness resolutions that can be unsustainable. By downsizing expectations and taking small steps en route to your goals, you may be more motivated to stay the course and realize your resolutions.



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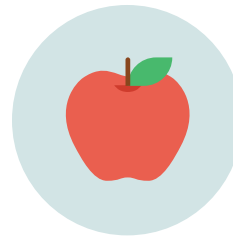
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## NUTRITION

# Herbs and spices for healthy hearts

A nutritious diet is a key component of a healthy lifestyle. When paired with regular physical activity, a nutritious diet can help people dramatically reduce their risk for various diseases, including heart disease.

According to the World Health Organization, ischaemic heart disease and stroke claim more lives each year than any other disease, annually accounting for roughly 15 percent of all deaths across the globe. Many deaths caused by heart disease can be prevented, and eating a healthy diet is a great preventive measure that anyone can take.

Though some people may associate healthy diets with bland foods that lack flavor, people can incorporate various heart-healthy herbs and spices into their favorite dishes to make them more nutritious and flavorful.

- **Garlic:** Garlic has long since earned its place on the kitchen spice rack. However, botanically, garlic is neither an herb or a spice but a vegetable. Regardless of how it's classified, garlic is loaded with flavor and can be used to improve just about any recipe, all the while benefitting heart health. The United States-based health services provider Mercy Health notes that garlic can help lower blood pressure and reduce bad cholesterol levels.

- **Cayenne pepper:**



Few ingredients may change a recipe as quickly as cayenne pepper. The addition of cayenne pepper can instantly make dishes more spicy. But cayenne pepper brings more than a little extra kick to the dinner table. Healthline notes that various studies have shown that capsaicin, the active ingredient in cayenne pepper, can provide a host of health benefits. One such study published in the British Journal of Nutrition found that adding capsaicin to a high-carbohydrate breakfast significantly reduced hunger and the desire to eat before lunch. Eating less can help people more effectively control their body weight, which in turn reduces their risk for heart disease.

- **Turmeric:** Garlic and even cayenne pepper may already be staples in many people's kitchens, but that's not necessarily so with turmeric. A yellow spice often used when preparing Indian foods, turmeric has anti-inflam-

matory properties thanks to curcumin, the part of turmeric responsible for giving it its yellow color. Experts acknowledge that turmeric needs to be studied more to definitively conclude its effects on heart health, but WebMD notes that one small study indicated that turmeric can help ward off heart attacks in people who have had bypass surgery.

- **Coriander:** A popular herb used across the globe, coriander is sometimes mistaken for cilantro. Though the two come from the same plant, cilantro refers to the leaves and stems of the coriander plant, while the coriander in recipes typically refers to the seeds of that plant. Mercy Health notes that coriander seeds may help reduce bad cholesterol and high blood pressure, both of which are significant risk factors for heart disease.

Heart-healthy herbs and spices can be added to various recipes, proving that nutritious meals need not be void of flavor.





**EXERCISE**

# Exercise and rest

Regular exercise has been linked to a host of health benefits. People who exercise regularly can lower their risk for chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes, and routine exercise can improve mood and potentially delay the onset of cognitive decline.

As vital as physical activity is to a healthy lifestyle, there is such a thing as too much exercise. According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, rest is an important part of training. Without ample rest, the body does not have time to recover before the next workout. That lack of rest not only adversely affects performance, but also increases a person's risk for health problems, including injuries that can sideline athletes for lengthy periods of time.

Committed athletes may have a hard time recognizing when they are pushing themselves too hard, and the line between perseverance and overdoing it can be thin. Many athletes credit their ability to push themselves mentally and physically with helping them achieve their fitness goals and thrive as competitors. But it's vital that athletes learn to recognize the signs that suggest they're exercising too much. The USNLM notes that the following are some signs of overdoing it with an exercise routine.



### SIGNS YOU'RE OVERDOING IT

- An inability to perform at your established level
- Requiring longer periods of rest between workout sessions
- Feeling tired
- Feeling depressed
- Experiencing mood swings or irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling sore muscles or heavy limbs
- Suffering overuse injuries such as runner's knee, achilles tendinitis, shin splints, and plantar fasciitis
- Loss of motivation
- Getting more colds
- Unintended weight loss
- Feelings of anxiety

The USNLM urges anyone experiencing the symptoms listed above to rest completely for between one and two weeks. After that period of rest, the body should be fully recovered. However, if any of these issues linger after two weeks, seek the advice of a health care provider. A health care provider may

recommend additional rest and/or conduct a series of tests to determine if an underlying issue is causing any of the aforementioned symptoms.

Rest is as vital to an effective exercise regimen as proper technique, ensuring the body has ample time to recover and reducing the risk of overuse injuries.



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HEALTH

# Healthy activities for kids of all ages



Children have a seemingly endless supply of energy. Channeling that energy into something positive can benefit kids' minds and bodies.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends various amounts of daily physical activity for children depending on their ages and abilities. Adhering to these recommendations is especially important in the wake of what many public health officials fear has become an epidemic of childhood obesity in many nations. For example, the United

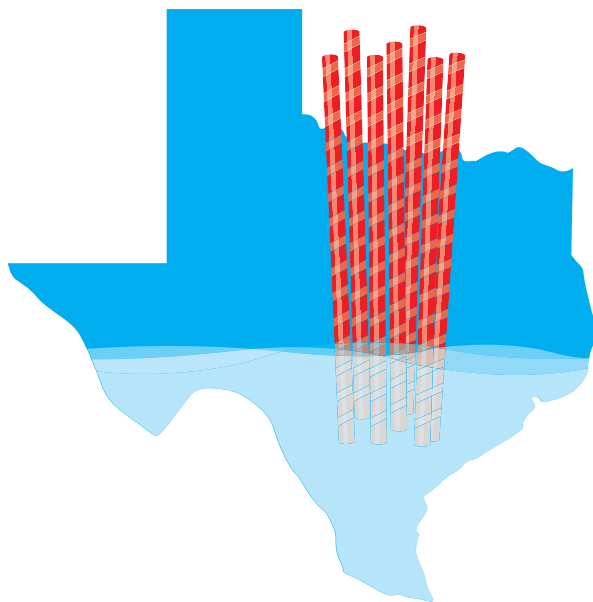
States-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that roughly 13.7 million children between the ages of two and 19 are presently obese. In Canada, the Childhood Obesity Foundation reports that childhood obesity rates have hovered around 12 percent for years.

Routine physical activity can help children maintain healthy weights, and it also pays dividends for youngsters' mental health. According to the American Psychological Association, children between

the ages of six and 18 who exercise regularly tend to have lower levels of depression, stress and psychological distress. Those findings, part of a 2019 study published in the journal *Sports Medicine*, reflect the ways exercise affects the mind. And the mental benefits don't stop there, as the study also found that youngsters who are physically active also have higher levels of positive self-image, life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

The amount of physical activity children need

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each month depends on their age, and the AAP recommends the following age-based guidelines.

- **Infants:** The AAP recommends infants get at least 30 minutes of tummy time and other interactive play throughout the day.

- **Toddlers:** Toddlers can be tough to keep up with, and parents can channel that energy into something positive by ensuring their kids get at least three hours of physical activity every day. Free play outside and daily neighborhood walks are some examples of appropriate physical activities for children in this age group.

- **Preschoolers:** Three-plus hours of physical activity, including one hour of moderate to vigorous

exercise, is recommended for preschool-aged youngsters. Tumbling, throwing and catching are some of the activities recommended by the AAP.

- **Elementary school students:** School-aged children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. The AAP recommends giving children in this age group ample opportunities for free play but also notes that organized sports focused on fun can be great outlets for kids in elementary school. Parents can speak with their children's pediatricians about appropriate muscle/bone strengthening activities, which the AAP recommends three days a week for kids in this age group.

- **Middle school stu-**

**dents:** Students in this age group need the same amount and types of exercise that elementary school students need. But the AAP advises parents to guide children toward physical activities that encourage socialization and to avoid having kids this age specialize in a single sport.

- **Teenagers:** Teenagers need an hour or more of physical activity most days of the week. Muscle/bone strengthening activities should be included three days per week. Activities that encourage socialization and competition are beneficial to teenagers' development.

Physical activity can benefit kids in myriad ways and should be a vital component of their daily lives.



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HEALTH

# 7 surprising health benefits of walking

According to Dr. Thomas Frieden, former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, walking is 'the closest thing people have to a wonder drug.' Any physical activity is a boon to personal health, and walking provides a host of benefits.

1. Strengthens bones: Walking can slow down the loss of bone mass due to osteoporosis. Arthritis.org notes that a study of postmenopausal women found that 30 minutes of walking each day reduced their risk of hip fractures by 40 percent.

2. Boosts cardio endurance: Regular walks can improve cardiovascular endurance, which can help people progress to more rigorous physical activity.

3. Burns calories: People can walk to burn calories and maintain or lose weight. The number of calories burned will depend on how briskly people walk, the distance they cover, their body weight, and the terrain on which they walk.

4. Improves cardiovascular health: The American Heart Association recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity

each week. Walking can fit that bill. Walking five days a week can reduce risk for coronary heart disease by roughly 19 percent, according to a report in the European Journal of Epidemiology.

5. Counteracts effects of weight-promoting genes: Researchers at Harvard Medical School looked at 32 obesity-promoting genes in more than 12,000 people who walked briskly for about an hour a day. Walking reduced the effects of weight-promoting genes by 50 percent.

6. Tame cravings: People who have a sweet tooth

can take notice that walking may steer people away from overindulgence. A pair of studies from the University of Exeter found a 15-minute walk can curb cravings for chocolate and reduce the chocolate consumed in stressful situations. Walking also helped to reduce cravings for other sugary snacks.

7. Reduces joint pain: Walking improves blood flow and helps protect the joints. This can keep people from developing arthritis and other stiffness.

Walking has many health benefits that can support the entire body.



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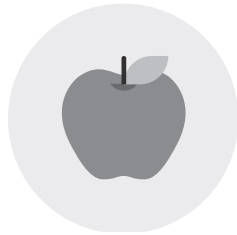
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**NUTRITION**

# Garlic



Garlic makes a delicious addition to various meals. Though some people may avoid garlic because of its potential to contribute to bad breath, doing so means people may miss out on some surprising health benefits produced by this powerful, if pungent, bulb.

1. Garlic bolsters the immune system. A 2015 review published in the Journal of Immunology Research found that garlic appears to enhance the functioning of the immune system by stimulating certain cell types. A strong immune system

helps people fight germs that can lead to colds and other illnesses.

2. Garlic can have a positive effect on blood pressure. According to the Cleveland Clinic, researchers believe that red blood cells turn the sulfur in garlic into hydrogen sulfide gas that expands the blood vessels. That makes it easier to regulate blood pressure. That's no minor benefit, as the American Heart Association notes that high blood pressure can contribute to heart disease and stroke.

3. Garlic can benefit the skin. Allicin is a


compound that is produced when garlic is crushed or chopped. According to the online health and wellness resource MedLife, allicin benefits the body in various ways, including killing the bacteria that causes acne.

4. Garlic may help reduce lead levels in the body. A 2012 study published in the journal Basic & Clinical Pharmacology & Toxicology studied the potentially therapeutic effects of garlic on 117 workers in the car bat-

tery industry. The clinical signs and symptoms of lead poisoning were significantly higher among workers who were not treated with garlic compared to those who were. Authors of the study concluded that garlic can be recommended for the treatment of mild-to-moderate lead poisoning.

Garlic can make for a nutritious addition to any meal, and some of its many health benefits may surprise even the most ardent supporters of this unique bulb.


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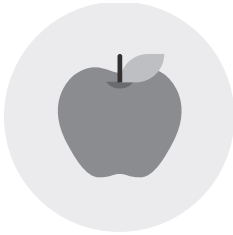
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**NUTRITION**

# Quinoa

Whole grains are vital components of a healthy diet. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, whole grains provide a host of nutritious benefits, including some that were discovered only recently.

The AND notes that whole grains were long seen as rich in fiber, which promotes healthy digestion and heart health. That's still true, and WebMD notes that many whole grains provide between one and four grams of fiber per serving,

an amount that puts them on the same level as various fruits and vegetables in regard to fiber content. But recent research has found that whole grains also are rich in protein, B vitamins and trace minerals like iron, magnesium and zinc.

Quinoa is one highly nutritious whole grain that's easy to find and even easier to prepare. Quinoa is considered a complete protein, which means it includes all nine essential amino acids. Why is that important? To understand that, it's best to first consider the importance of protein. Protein is comprised of 20 amino acids, 11 of which the body can produce on its own. For optimal health, the body needs all 20 amino acids. Diet is the only way to get the nine essential amino acids that your body cannot produce on its own. Complete proteins like quinoa provide all nine in a single food, making them especially healthy, convenient options for people looking to ensure they get enough protein in their diets.

As noted, whole grains

are good sources of iron, and quinoa is no exception. That's a considerable benefit, as iron is an essential part of hemoglobin, a red protein that's responsible for transporting oxygen in the blood.

Quinoa also is a good source of magnesium. That's another significant benefit of including quinoa in your diet, as the Office of Dietary Supplements notes low levels of magnesium have been linked to various ailments, including high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Pregnant women or women hoping to become pregnant, as well as their male partners, also can discuss the benefits of including quinoa in their diets with their physicians. That's because quinoa is high in

the B vitamin folate, which is needed to perform various functions in the body, including the production of red and white blood cells in the bone marrow. Adequate folic acid consumption before and during pregnancy can protect against miscarriages and congenital defects. And while women may be familiar with the importance of folate regarding their pregnancies or future pregnancies, men also may need to monitor their folate intake. A 2013 study from researchers at McGill University in Montreal found that paternal folate deficiency in mice was associated with a significant increase in congenital deformities.

Whole grains like quinoa benefit the body in myriad ways, making them essential to your diet.



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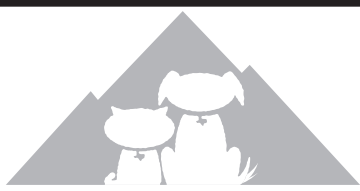
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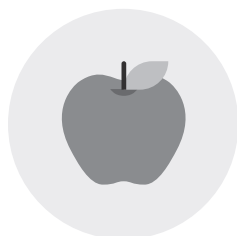
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**NUTRITION**

# Mood foods

No one is immune to the occasional bad mood. Whether it's the weather, waking up on the wrong side of the bed or another variable, various factors can have an adverse affect on a person's mood.

Food is one factor that can have a positive effect on mood. Certain foods have been found to positively affect mood, so incorporating them into your diet may help you stay positive even on those days when you get up on the wrong side of the bed.

- Fatty fish: A study from British researchers published in the Archives

of General Psychiatry found that a daily dose of an omega-3 fatty acid called eicosapentaenoic acid, or EPA, helped patients with depression significantly reduce their feelings of sadness and pessimism. Hackensack Meridian Health notes that salmon, albacore tuna, sardines, trout, and anchovies are rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

- Nuts and seeds: The minerals selenium, copper, magnesium, manganese, and zinc have all been linked to mental health, and nuts are rich

in each of those minerals. Hackensack Meridian Health notes that almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, and peanuts are particularly good sources of the immune system-boosting minerals zinc and magnesium.

- Dark, leafy greens: Dark, leafy greens like kale, spinach and collards are rich in iron and magnesium, both of which can increase serotonin levels and help reduce feelings of anxiety. Dark, leafy greens also help the body fight inflammation, which

**FRESH HERBS**

continued on pg 15



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FRESH HERBS

continued from pg 14



can have a positive effect on mood. A 2015 study published in the journal JAMA Psychiatry found that brain inflammation contributed to certain behaviors, including low mood, that appear during major depressive episodes.

• **Dark chocolate:** Chocolate lovers may be happy to learn that dark chocolate can improve mood. A 2009 study published in the Journal of Proteome Research

found that dark chocolate helped to reduce levels of the hormone cortisol, which has been linked to stress. Hackensack Meridian Health notes that, when consumed in moderation, dark chocolate made of at least 70 percent cocoa can help people relax.

Various foods can have a beneficial effect on mood, potentially helping people to stay positive when doing so proves challenging.



EXERCISE

# Pelvic floor exercises

A strong pelvic floor is essential for various reasons. According to Maddie Gentile, a certified personal trainer in New York, most women do not consider their pelvic floors until the muscles in this area become weakened.

**WHAT DO PELVIC MUSCLES DO?**

According to the online health and wellness resource Healthline, the pelvic floor muscles support the bladder, bowel and uterus. They also play an important role in sexual function, increasing the ability to feel

pleasurable sensations. During pregnancy, pelvic floor muscles support the baby and contribute to the birthing process.

**SIDE EFFECTS OF WEAKENED MUSCLES**

Various conditions can develop when pelvic floor muscles weaken. Weakened muscles may contribute to urinary incontinence or the more mild stress incontinence, which involves leaking urine after laughing, sneezing or coughing, indicates the Mayo Clinic. Weak pelvic muscles also may cause fecal incontinence.

The pelvic muscles are instrumental in keeping the body upright and supported. Heather Jeffcoat, DPT, founder of Femina Physical Therapy, says 'the pelvic floor works in tandem with the deep abdominal muscles, acting as an internal corset.' Weak muscles may lead to back pain or even uncomfortable sex in addition to incontinence. Furthermore, weakened pelvic floor muscles can contribute to pelvic organ prolapse. According to Harvard Health, during prolapse the uterus, bladder or rectum drops or presses into or out of the vagina.

Pelvic floor muscles can weaken after pregnancy and childbirth. Factors like age, heavy lifting, chronic coughing, and obesity also are factors, states Healthline.

**EXERCISING PELVIC MUSCLES**

By working pelvic floor muscles through proper contraction and relax-

ation, women can ensure that the muscles do not become too loose. Kegel exercises are among the most popular pelvic floor exercises.

To find the pelvic floor muscles, one must first stop urination midstream. That action is targeting the right muscles. According to the Mayo Clinic, to do Kegels, imagine you are sitting on a marble and tighten your pelvic muscles as if you're lifting the marble. Try it for three seconds at a time, then relax for a count of three. Be careful not to flex the muscles in the abdomen at the same time. Aim for at least three sets of 10 to 15 repetitions per day.

In addition to Kegels, squats, lifting the torso into a 'bridge' while lying on the floor, or doing a 'bird dog' by extending the opposite arm and leg out while supporting the body on the other knee and arm (like a modified plank) can help.

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