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## 15 Food Swaps That Could Save Your Life

These 15 foods have life-extending superpowers! Add them to your grocery list to help your body fight disease, ward off cancer, reduce your risk of diabetes -- and make you healthier and stronger ([16 Photos](#))

Nicole Yorio Jurick on Oct 26, 2011 at 3:50PM [1 chime](#)

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MAREN CARUSO/PHOTODISC/GUY CRITTENDEN/WORKBOOK STOCK/GETTY IMAGES

### To Protect Your Heart -- and Your Figure -- Snack on Pistachios -- Not Pretzels

If you're craving a snack that's salty and crunchy, reach for the little green nuts. Eating 1.5 ounces of nuts a day may reduce the risk of [heart disease](#), says Jackie Newgent, registered dietitian and author of *The Big Green Cookbook*. Those heart [healthy](#) benefits are due to the monounsaturated fats in the nuts, which lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol and increase HDL ("good") cholesterol. If you're watching the scale, know that pistachio eaters lost more weight than those who snacked on pretzels, a study from UCLA found. "The work that's required to shell a pistachio makes it harder to munch mindlessly, Newgent says. And unlike carb-rich pretzels, pistachios contain filling fiber, protein, and energy-boosting B6 to keep you satisfied for longer.

**Serve it Up:** Place 30 pistachios in a baggie for a 100-calorie snack, then store at your desk, in your purse, or in your glove compartment for the next time your tummy rumbles.

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### **To Keep Blood Pressure in Check, Coat With Panko Instead of Italian Breadcrumbs**

Panko, Japanese breadcrumbs made from crustless bread, contain less than one-tenth the sodium of Italian breadcrumbs. This is critical since excess sodium can cause high blood pressure, one of the leading risk factors of heart disease. And though the two coatings are calorically equivalent, "you can use less panko and still get the same crunch," Newgent says. "Panko breadcrumbs are coarser, and therefore absorb less oil, which translates to way less fat in every forkful." For an even healthier coating, reach for whole-wheat panko to add fiber and protein to whatever you're cooking.

**Serve it up:** Coat chicken breasts, pork chops or eggplant in ¼ cup of panko, or use panko in place of breadcrumbs as a binding agent in turkey meatballs or crab cakes.

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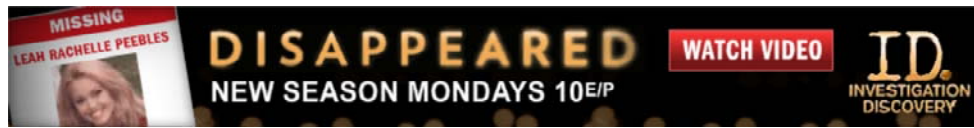
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REGGIE CASAGRANDE/STOCKBYTE/FOODCOLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

### To Ward Off Breast Cancer, Think Quinoa, Not Couscous

Plain couscous contains protein, but not much else, Newgent says. Whereas a half cup of quinoa gets you almost 8 grams of iron—much more than any other grain. It also offers a hefty 5 grams of fiber, important for protection against breast cancer. “Fiber binds and eliminates excess estrogen, thereby leading to a potentially lessened risk of estrogen-sensitive breast cancer,” Newgent says. In fact, researchers found that diets rich in fiber from whole grains like quinoa offered significant protection against breast cancer in premenopausal women, according to a study in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*. In another study, black women who ate quinoa and other magnesium-rich whole grains reduced their risk of diabetes by 19 percent.

**Serve it up:** Add a ½ cup serving of quinoa to your plate 3-4 times a week. Mix quinoa with nuts and dried fruit or grilled veggies, or [serve as a side](#) in place of rice or couscous.

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