



- These foods are among the healthiest on the planet.

10 perfect foods

Nutrient-rich and great-tasting, these foods pack a powerful punch

by Jackie Newgent, RD

IF YOU WERE STUCK on a deserted island, what foods would you want with you? At first you might think about your favorite snacks, but ultimately you'd need nutrient-packed foods to keep you healthy for the long haul.

To figure out what would make the cut, we analyzed dozens of foods. We awarded points for the amount of key nutrients that each one contains and crossed off any that have trans fats or high amounts of saturated fat or sodium. The result: 10 "perfect" foods (and five runners-up).

ALMONDS

The combination of protein and fiber (3 grams an ounce) in this tasty nut will keep you feeling full. A good source of healthy monounsaturated fats, almonds also contain calcium and vitamin E. Studies have shown that eating them may help keep your bones strong and perhaps even lower your cholesterol.

TRY THIS:

- Sprinkle pan-toasted, sliced or slivered almonds onto nearly any cooked veggie, like broccoli, kale or green beans.
- Top a scoop of lowfat frozen yogurt with sliced almonds. ▶

PERFECT FOODS CONTINUED

- Make an almond-butter and jelly sandwich (instead of PB&J).

AVOCADOS

The fat in avocados may be high, but it's mostly the heart-healthy monounsaturated kind. They're also a great source of vitamin C, potassium, folate and lutein, which is beneficial for eye health.

Avocados contain a plant sterol (beta-sitosterol) that may help lower cholesterol levels.

TRY THIS:

- For a twist on traditional guacamole, combine cubed avocado with diced fresh figs, grapes or mango.
- Mash avocado and stir until smooth, add a squirt of lemon or lime juice, and use in place of mayo or other condiments.
- Dice and sprinkle onto corn chowder, chicken-and-rice soup, or tomato soup (add the avocado just before serving).

BROCCOLI

It's packed with vitamins A, C, K and beta-carotene, as well as possible cancer-fighting compounds like sulforaphane.

TRY THIS:

- Steam some florets and stuff into your favorite burrito.
- Finely chop and add to rice pilaf (add during the last 15 minutes of cooking).
- Stir-fry or steam and mix into Chinese takeout to create a more nutritious meal.

EGGS

For just 75 calories, one little egg gives you 13 essential vitamins and minerals, including choline (which may help prevent birth defects), selenium (an antioxidant) and riboflavin (which helps you produce red blood cells and releases energy from carbs).

Don't skip the yolk; it contains the bulk of the egg's nutrients,

5 almost perfect foods

These runners-up are fabulous in their own way.

- 1 apples** One fresh, crisp large apple provides about 5 grams of dietary fiber and is packed with antioxidants like quercetin that keep your whole body healthy. Eat the peel to get the biggest nutritional bang.
- 2 canned tomatoes** (no salt added) Canned tomato products are naturally richer than fresh ones in lycopene, a potent antioxidant that plays a key role in heart health, cancer prevention and more.
- 3 oats** Oat bran and whole-oat products (like oatmeal) contain high levels of beta-glucan, a soluble fiber that can help stabilize blood sugar levels, lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol and maybe even help you slim down.
- 4 beans** Cooked dried beans are high in protein and fiber but low in fat, and they may protect against breast cancer and heart disease.
- 5 dark chocolate** Thanks to powerful antioxidants, eating a little bit each day may improve circulation and reduce blood pressure.

including vision-protecting lutein and zeaxanthin. Because they're a good source of high-quality protein, eggs may also help you feel full longer.

TRY THIS:

- Serve a pan-cooked egg on top of a pizza slice, like they do in Italy.
- Make your own version of egg drop soup by cracking and stirring an egg into your favorite broth-based soup while simmering. Bring the soup to a boil for 1 minute to ensure that the egg is cooked.
- For a filling lunch, have an egg in a pita stuffed with lettuce, onion and chunky salsa. Or try an egg on a bun with arugula, tomato and light mayo.

KALE

Though this leafy green looks a little like spinach, it's actually more closely related to cabbage, and provides more nutritional value per calorie than nearly any other food. It's rich in vitamin K (important for bone health and normal blood clotting) and beta-carotene (which protects your sight). It also contains compounds that may reduce your risk of ovarian, breast and other types of cancers.

TRY THIS:

- Thinly slice fresh kale and mix with lighter greens, such as Bibb or romaine lettuce, in a salad.
- Steam and serve as a "bed" for poached eggs.
- Finely chop it and use it in place of spinach in cooked dishes, such as lasagna.

QUINOA

It's now super-trendy (you can find it in major supermarkets these days, not just health food stores), but this grain has actually been around for thousands of years. It's different from almost every other plant food on the planet because it's a complete protein, which means it contains all of the essential amino acids that your body needs.

What's more, quinoa has a significant amount of iron, potassium and magnesium. The tiny grains look similar to sesame seeds and have a nutty flavor and fluffy, crunchy texture—and they cook in less than 15 minutes!

TRY THIS:

- Stir cooked, chilled quinoa into your salad. It also works well in bean ►



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PERFECT FOODS CONTINUED

salads and even tuna salad.

- Eat quinoa at any meal that would normally include rice (like Japanese or Chinese food). Drizzle a little teriyaki or soy sauce onto it for extra flavor.
- Steam it, mix with fresh basil or thyme, and top with your favorite stew.

RASPBERRIES

They're loaded with potassium, vitamin C, fiber and protective antioxidants like anthocyanins, salicylic acid, quercetin and catechins. They're also especially rich in a compound called ellagic acid, which research suggests may play an important role in cancer prevention.

TRY THIS:

- For a tasty vinaigrette dressing, purée fresh or frozen raspberries in a blender with equal parts olive oil and red wine vinegar.
- Create a sandwich spread by mixing Dijon mustard with mashed raspberries.
- Lightly smash them to make a simple jam for toast.

SWEET POTATOES

One sweet potato has all the beta-carotene you need in a day—a nutrient that research indicates may be cancer-protective. Your heart will be happy, too, thanks to the vitamin C and potassium content. Be sure to eat the peel—it contains fiber along with additional disease-fighting phytonutrients.

TRY THIS:

- Dice boiled, chilled sweet potato and stir into your favorite guacamole recipe.
- For a unique taste twist, slice boiled sweet potato and use instead of tomato as a topping on your turkey or veggie burger.
- Mash up baked sweet potato with a little vegetable broth and serve as an eye-appealing “bed” for an entrée, like salmon.

TEFF

You've probably never heard of it, but it's definitely worth trying. These tiny whole grains (which you can find at health food stores or at bobsredmill.com) are super-nutritious: Teff has more than twice as much iron and about 20 times as much calcium as other grains, plus a significant amount of fiber. But it's the unique molasses-like flavor that will really win you over.

TRY THIS:

- Pour ¼ cup boiling water over ½ cup dry (uncooked) teff. Let sit for about 10 minutes, then mix into extra-lean ground beef or turkey for a healthier, moist and tasty burger.
- Stir up to ¼ cup of it into 2 cups of a thin jarred pasta sauce, then simmer for 15 minutes. It'll give the sauce a hearty meat-like texture.
- Eat it for breakfast instead of oatmeal. Combine ¼ cup teff with 1 cup water; cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Sprinkle with cinnamon or drizzle with pure maple syrup.

YOGURT (PLAIN, FAT-FREE)

Like other dairy foods, yogurt is a good source of protein and calcium. But thanks to its live active cultures (good bacteria), it may also help your digestive and immune systems. To be sure you're getting what you need, look for the “Live & Active Cultures” seal on the package.

TRY THIS:

- Mix equal parts yogurt and mayonnaise to make a naturally lower-fat mayo. If you prefer a more intense flavor, add in a few drops of hot sauce.
- Use yogurt instead of butter or cream for healthier, extra-creamy mashed potatoes. You can also mash it with other steamed or boiled veggies, like carrots.
- Stir into extra-lean ground beef to make a more moist meatball or meatloaf. **wd**