

Ten Superfoods for Runners  
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I don't know about you, but I love to eat. I look at food as fuel and without it, I can't do the things I want to do. And summer is my favorite gastronomical season because it's full of wonderful fruits and vegetables that give me the energy I need to go the distance. It's important to look at food as fuel and eat what we know will help us do the things we want to do, whether it's exercising or simply getting through the work day. The following 10 "superfoods" are selections that should be included in every runner's diet. Sure, there are others out there, but these are easy to come by, easy to prepare, and easy to eat! Read on for more...

As runners we are expending energy daily and using nutrients that are necessary for our health and vitality. During exercise (and throughout the day) we are releasing free-radicals into our body that need to be "neutralized" by antioxidants. Luckily, nature is generous and provides us with many nutritional options that can pave the path to greater fitness and health. The following 10 "superfoods" are selections that should be included in every runner's diet. Sure, there are others out there, but these are easy to come by, easy to prepare, and easy to eat!

**Blueberries** Ounce for ounce, these little blue jewels may contain more antioxidants than any other fruit or vegetable. The most powerful health promoting compounds in blueberries are phytochemicals that belong to the flavonoid family. Besides combating diseases such as heart disease and cancer, blueberries may boost brainpower—at least in rats. When fed blueberry extract for nine weeks, elderly rats outperformed a control group at such tasks as running through mazes and balancing on rotating logs. And, when aging rats ate a blueberry enriched diet for four months, they performed as well in memory tests as younger rats! This will give you an edge in the rat race, for sure!

**Quinoa** Quinoa (pronounced keen-wa) is by far the most super of superfoods. It is a whole grain and is similar to rice and cous cous. Quinoa is high in fiber, magnesium, riboflavin, antioxidants and protein. In fact, not only is quinoa high in protein, but the protein it supplies is *complete protein*, meaning that it includes all nine essential amino acids. This is essential for runners as we need protein to promote recovery from our workouts. Eat quinoa before your tough workouts and you're taking carb-loading to a whole new level! And because of its protein content, it's great as part of a post-run recovery meal!

**Broccoli** Broccoli is one mean green antioxidant loaded machine! A number of studies have linked regular consumption of cruciferous vegetables like broccoli to a reduced risk of breast, colon and stomach cancers. Broccoli is a rich source of beta-carotene, fiber and vitamin C (1 cup contains more C than an orange). The best way to unleash the nutrients is by cooking light and chewing hard. But if you simply cannot stand broccoli, try brussels sprouts, cabbage, or bok choy.

**Tomatoes** Tomatoes contain lycopene, probably the most powerful antioxidant among the carotenoids, the compounds that turn fruits and veggies deep orange. Studies have linked tomatoes, especially once they are cooked (such as ketchup, stewed tomatoes or spaghetti sauces), to a reduced risk of prostate cancer and other cancers of the digestive tract.

**Potatoes** Spuds are one of the world's greatest foods, filled with calcium, niacin, iron, vitamin C, potassium and plenty of carbohydrates. Just eat them in moderation. Too much of a good thing is not a good thing—studies have linked excessive intake of starch (potatoes, white bread, white rice, and processed foods) to obesity. A potato portion should be the size of your fist. Also, try to incorporate sweet potatoes and yams into your diet, as they are loaded with antioxidants, metabolize less rapidly, and wreak less havoc with blood sugar.

**Avocados** The high fat content of one avocado may send shivers up a low-fat dieter's spine, but besides being an excellent source of folate and potassium, avocado's strength actually comes from its fat. The

monounsaturated fats, particularly oleic acid found in avocados, can actually improve cholesterol levels in the body and help control diabetes. The fiber content is impressive too. And this one happens to be my favorite one on the list. Yum!

**Bananas** It's a myth that bananas are high in fat. Bananas are slightly higher in energy than other fruits but the calories come mainly from carbohydrates- excellent for fueling before and after exercise. Bananas are also loaded with potassium that helps lower blood pressure, and vitamin B6 for healthy skin and hair.

**Beets** Pickled, boiled, juiced, roasted or in a cake, beetroot needs to find a place on every runner's plate. Beets are best when it comes to protecting against cancer and helping to build iron stores. They're loaded with folate, a B vitamin women need to get plenty of - folate protects against birth defects. Grate beets into a salad or add to your favorite stir-fry.

**Nuts and Seeds** An excellent snack food high in omega-3 fatty acids (which are great for your heart and many of us are deficient in), zinc and iron. Raw, unsalted nuts and seeds are best. You can't go wrong with a handful of nuts a day - walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, macadamia, or pistachio nuts. Also try sesame, pumpkin and sunflower seeds sprinkled over the top of a salad.

**Salmon** Salmon and other cold-water fish (e.g. tuna, mackerel, and halibut) contain oils that are rich in omega-3. This "good fat" will protect your arteries against plaque build up and is effective in lowering the "bad" cholesterol. Note: Try to choose wild salmon, or limit your intake of farmed salmon to 2, 5 ounce servings a week (to minimize methyl-mercury intake).

**Water** Although technically not a "food", the body is completely dependent on water for survival, which makes it the 11<sup>th</sup> superfood! Dehydration is one of the main causes of fatigue and muscular stiffness. By drinking water throughout the day you will notice a dramatic increase in energy levels, not to mention the health and vitality of your hair and skin. And with the summer we've been having, hydrating is especially important in hot, humid conditions. You are most dehydrated when you first wake up, so try to hydrate first thing in the morning. If your urine is light yellow to clear by noon, you're doing a good job!

Happy running (and eating)!

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