

# Superfoods

## Top **12** Foods for Women

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**I**n general, we all need the same nutrients to be healthy. Men and women alike, for example, need protein, fat, calcium, and fiber. However, being the unique creatures we are and needing to perform the assortment of nature's special tasks makes us special in more ways than one. There are specific nutrients—and foods in which they're found—that are especially beneficial to women. And lucky for us, they all taste delicious!

"Eating well is as much about the nutrients in the food as it is about the taste. Foods that are filled with nutrition naturally and have great flavor—that's what makes foods truly super," says Sue Moores, RD, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association and nutrition consultant in St. Paul, Minnesota. See if you're eating all you can from the following list to maximize your body's health potential.

### **1 BEANS**

Probably their biggest attribute, beans are loaded with fiber, and who couldn't use more of that? Their soluble fiber slows the speed at which food passes through the intestines. The slower speed allows some substances like cholesterol to be picked up along the way and carried out of the body. In the case of cholesterol, that prevents it from being absorbed and impacting your blood cholesterol levels. The insoluble fiber speeds passage of substances through the intestines, which helps your body get rid of waste more efficiently and consistently.

### **2 BLUEBERRIES**

With more antioxidant power than most other fruits, these little blue spheres offer a variety of health benefits. One is their apparent ability to help slow or prevent some deterioration that comes with aging. Substances in blueberries may help improve motor skills involved in walking and sitting, as well as hand, finger, and toe movements. They may also help with the short-term memory loss associated with aging.

In addition, compounds in blueberries may help prevent the growth of breast, oral, and colon cancer cells. Blueberries also contain the same substances found in cranberries that help prevent urinary tract infections, which you'll read about presently. All these benefits—and that's just scratching the surface of rewards that come from consuming the tiny berry.

### **3 CHERRIES**

While these little red fruits deliver many of the same vitamins and minerals as other fruits, they also have a unique property. Cherries, especially the tart or sour variety, are one of the few foods that contain a readily available form of the hormone melatonin, which helps control our waking and sleeping patterns. If you're having trouble sleeping, a little boost from this hormone may help get your natural sleep cycles back in order.

### **4 CRANBERRIES AND JUICE**

These bouncy little red berries and their juice are loaded with a type of phytochemical called

*proanthocyanidins*. While these nutrients give cranberries their deep color, they're responsible for far more than making the turkey look more festive on Thanksgiving. They help prevent bacteria from sticking to various parts of the body, for example, the walls of the urinary track. If bacteria can't cling to the walls of the urinary tract, they can't multiply and cause a nasty infection. Proanthocyanidins can also help prevent bacteria from attaching to the teeth and the walls of the stomach, reducing the risk of cavities and gum disease, as well as painful stomach ulcers (which are caused by bacteria). Just a couple of 8-ounce glasses a day should do the trick.

**5 EGGS**  
Over the years, eggs have been branded the bad guys of the food world, so few people know they actually can be good for us. First, they contain less cholesterol than was originally thought and very little saturated fat, which has been shown to have a greater effect



on blood cholesterol levels than does cholesterol. In fact, the American Heart Association now says up to one egg a day can fit into a healthy diet.

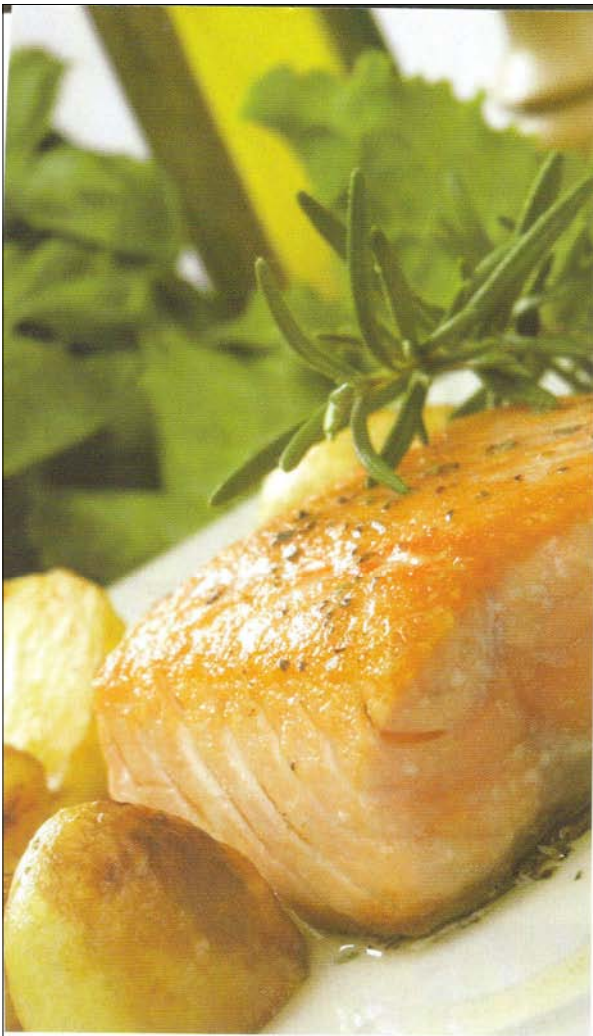
So what's in it for you? In addition to being low in calories and a great source of protein, the egg's big boost to women is in the form of choline. One large egg contains 125 milligrams of this mineral—one third of the daily recommended intake for an adult woman. While an essential nutrient for all women, choline is crucial to pregnant women and those of childbearing age as it plays a key role in the brain development of fetuses and can have an effect on memory later in life as well.

**6 FLAX**  
Flaxseeds contain substances called *lignans* that work as antioxidants and provide heart-healthy benefits. But they also act as phytoestrogens, meaning that they work like the hormone estrogen in the body. These lignans have been shown to lower the risk of breast cancer and because of their hormone-like activity, they help promote a normal menstrual cycle and may help lengthen the second half of the cycle. These two benefits boost the chance of conception, as well as decrease the unpleasant symptoms of peri-menopause, including mood swings, headaches, and fluid retention.

**7 LEAN BEEF**  
Beef has really gotten a bad rap. Because many cuts of beef contain a good deal of artery-clogging saturated fat, many people have shunned all beef. This is unfortunate because beef has a number of good qualities, and there are lean cuts from which to choose. For women, beef's biggest asset is its iron content. Beef is one of the best sources of dietary iron, which is crucial to the makeup of hemoglobin in our blood. Hemoglobin's job is to carry oxygen throughout the body to all of the organs and tissues that need it. Anemia, the biggest problem associated with not eating enough iron, is quite common in women. Go ahead and enjoy some lean beef a couple times a week, such as eye round, top round roasts or steaks, sirloin, or 95% lean ground beef.

**8 OATS**  
This simple, old-fashioned favorite is good for you in a number of ways. Like yogurt, oats can help you maintain a healthy weight thanks to their fiber content. Fiber, like protein, helps to keep us feeling fuller longer because it's digested slowly. So a big bowl of oatmeal in the morning will help see you through to lunch much better than a fiber-lacking muffin or bagel. In addition, the specific type of fiber found in oats—beta-glucan—is important. A soluble fiber, when mixed with water it creates a viscous substance that helps maintain heart health. Not only has it been shown to decrease the body's absorption of cholesterol, it also may help raise the good (or high-density lipoprotein) cholesterol levels, both of which help lower the risk of heart disease.

**9 SALMON**  
Due to its high omega-3 fatty acid content, salmon has received a lot of attention for its heart-healthy benefits. These fatty acids may help reduce the risk of blood clot formation and may also lower blood levels of



total and low-density lipoprotein (or bad) cholesterol, both of which help lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. But omega-3s do something else, something much more important for women, especially those who are pregnant, planning to get pregnant, or breastfeeding. These fatty acids (specifically docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA) help the brain develop properly, which is most crucial in the three months before and after birth. Make a 3-ounce serving of salmon part of your diet twice a week.

## 10 SPINACH

Here's another important food for women who are or are planning to become pregnant, but it offers benefits for everyone else as well. Just one half cup of cooked spinach has one quarter of your daily folate needs, or about 100 milligrams. Adequate folate helps prevent a certain type of birth defect in unborn babies. It also helps lower blood levels of homocysteine, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. If spinach isn't your favorite, one cup of cooked broccoli will give you the same benefit.

## 11 WALNUTS

"Walnuts are a great snack for women because they're portable and are a good

source of heart-healthy fats and protein to keep blood sugar and energy levels stable," says Kate Geagan, RD, a Utah-based nutrition consultant. These nuts are another of the few foods that are rich sources of omega-3 fatty acids. This means they, too, can help prevent the formation of blood clots and, therefore, reduce your risk of heart disease. In addition, the fatty acids found in walnuts can help transport needed material in and waste products out of your brain. This allows the cells to work better so your brain will also function better.

## 12 YOGURT

Including yogurt in your diet on a regular basis is like hitting the trifecta at the race track. First, you're getting a great dose of protein—as much as that found in one egg or an ounce of meat. In addition to all of its body building and maintenance work, protein—because it takes longer to digest than carbs such as bread and cereal—helps to keep us feeling full longer. So if you have a cup of yogurt in your breakfast, you won't have to dig for change at the vending machine an hour later at work as you might if you had a more carbohydrate-based meal. And that's especially helpful if you're trying to lose or maintain weight.

As for benefit No. 2, we all know that yogurt is a great source of calcium, a mineral famous for building and maintaining bone but also key to maintaining a healthy blood pressure. And finally, yogurt is full of probiotics—good bacteria. The body, especially the digestive tract, is full of bacteria that perform all sorts of functions. When those bacteria get disrupted, perhaps by sickness or antibiotic use, the results can be less than pleasant: diarrhea and yeast infections, for example. The good bacteria in yogurt helps to keep the proper bacteria balance to prevent, lessen, or remedy those problems. Simply eat an 8-ounce cup of yogurt a day or get fancy and whip up a smoothie by tossing it in the blender with some frozen fruit. ♣

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