

[IMAGE]

Superfoods to Save the Day

By Dr. James D. Krystosik

It is an age-old truth that eating fruits and vegetables improves health. But not all produce is created equal. Meet the superheroes of produce: superfoods, which offer superior disease-fighting capabilities, boost the immune system, fight fatigue and much more.

It's a bird; it's a plane ... no, it's a superfood! Considering that a recent survey revealed three out of four Americans don't have a clue of what superfoods are, chances are you may be one of the uninitiated. So, what are superfoods? Well, for starters, they are foods that provide health benefits which go well beyond basic nutrition, giving your body a youthful vigor and disease-fighting power. Sorry, superfoods won't give you the power to leap tall buildings, run faster than a speeding bullet or make you more powerful than a locomotive. But they will help boost your immune system, prevent heart disease, improve your sex drive, fight fatigue and much more.

Superfoods stand much taller than the typical foods you know are good for you. Almost every superfood is found in the plant kingdom. There are a few exceptions, such as cold-water fish that provide healthy omega-3 oils to squelch inflammation and reduce the risk of heart disease; or probiotics, the beneficial bacteria that boost our immune system and maintain health in the digestive tract.

A little over 10 years ago, researchers began to uncover a virtual goldmine of disease-fighting compounds called *phytochemicals* (naturally occurring plant chemicals) in fruits and vegetables. Phytochemicals include cancer-fighting lycopene in tomatoes and lutein in spinach, which shows great promise for preventing cataracts and macular degeneration. So, mom was right all along - we should be eating our fruits and vegetables every day. But new research is shifting the spotlight to a whole new generation of superfoods your mom probably never even heard about. Let me explain by introducing you to the humble broccoli plant.

Broccoli evokes a lot of groans around the dinner table in most American households. Yet despite the resistance to broccoli, scientists continue to find more reasons why we should eat it often. For starters, broccoli is rich in vitamin C, folic acid, calcium and fiber. More importantly, researchers at Johns Hopkins

University discovered a compound in broccoli called *sulphuraphane*. These scientists discovered that this extraordinary compound not only kills *H. Pylori*, a bacterium that causes ulcers, but also is a powerful anticancer compound. Considering how new research has found a possible link between *H. Pylori* and Alzheimer's and heart disease, broccoli is beginning to look more like a medicine - one without side effects or an insurance copayment - than a food. It appears that nutrition is going back to the future; in the fifth century, Hippocrates said, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food."

As good as broccoli is for our health, broccoli sprouts are even better. Here's why: Dr. John Talalay, one of the leading researchers at Johns Hopkins investigating the benefits of broccoli sprouts, found that broccoli sprouts have up to 100 times more sulphuraphane than the mature broccoli plant. Quite impressive, don't you think? Dr. Talalay has demonstrated that 1 ounce of broccoli sprouts has as much of the cancer-fighting compound as 1 1/4 pounds of garden-variety broccoli. That will certainly save you a lot of chewing.

The nutritional profile of broccoli sprouts is impressive. However, all sprouted seeds and young cereal grasses are chock-full of stored nutrition and recuperative powers. Dr. Barry Mack at the University of Pennsylvania found that sprouted seeds have an average vitamin increase of more than 500 percent. There's a lot of energy stored up inside sprouts and the young shoots of sprouted grasses. For example, wheat grass and barley grass sprouts contain over five times more iron than spinach, 13 times more of the antioxidant beta-carotene than carrots, and 55 times more vitamin C than apples. Incidentally, wheat grass and barley grass are gluten-free, which makes them safe for individuals who have gluten allergies or sensitivities.

Green foods, like wheat grass and barley grass, capture the sun's power to produce chlorophyll - the green pigment in plants and the source of human life. Nutritionists agree that the more green foods we can eat, the better. That's why spirulina and chlorella, two nutrient-dense green superfoods, should be included in your diet for optimal health. Both spirulina and chlorella boost the immune system. Spirulina is 65 percent protein by weight. Chlorella is the richest source of chlorophyll on the planet. Can you see why superfoods are one of the hottest current research and public interest topics?

So, by all means, continue to eat whole-wheat bread or barley soup; these whole grains are good for you. But as you can see, eating wheat or barley sprouts is even better for you and goes way beyond basic nutrition. It's almost hard to believe there is that much nutrition in such a tiny package, isn't it? If you think about it, it makes perfect sense. When a farmer plants a tiny little seed of broccoli, wheat barley or any other seed in the ground, in just a few short days the seed has to muster up enough energy to push its way up

through the soil and burst out into the sunlight on its way to becoming a mature plant. It takes a lot of energy to do that. That's why I tell my patients that if you want to have as much energy as you did when you were a kid (only this time, with much better judgment), be sure you take your daily dose of superfoods. Take it from Paracelsus, the father of pharmacology: "All that mankind needs for good health and healing is provided in nature ... the challenge to science is to find it."

Scientists have now discovered more than 4,000 compounds in plants that reduce inflammation, stimulate growth and repair cells, tissues and organs, as well as detoxify or neutralize cancer-causing chemicals in our industrialized world. (You can visit www.biovalidity.com for current research on 250 of them.) That is why the National Cancer Institute (NCI) currently has the "designer foods" project underway. According to Dr. Herbert Pierson, a toxicologist at NCI, the project is seeking to take advantage of the cancer-fighting potential in our diet by creating foods enriched with health-promoting substances already found naturally in many fruits, vegetables, grains, herbs and spices. But don't hold your breath - it may take years before their findings are reported.

Superfoods are nature's "designer foods," and they're available now. They contain a whopping dose of these health-promoting compounds. They also have a high concentration of protein, essential fats, vitamins, minerals and trace minerals - all contained in one tiny package. Superfoods are very low in calories, yet are nutrient-dense. Consequently, they curb food cravings and are a perfect weight-loss tool.

Most importantly, superfoods pack a powerful, knock-out punch to free radicals - unstable and harmful molecules generated from our environment - before they can cause damage to our body cells, tissues and organs. Free radicals are generated from normal body metabolism, but excess amounts stem from pollution in our air, water and food (stress, medications, fried foods, cigarette smoke, etc.). Antioxidants mop up free radicals and render them harmless. Superfoods contain mega doses of antioxidants that are primarily stored in the plant pigments, which give each plant its distinctive color. These pigments possess potent antioxidants with health benefits that help our body systems work more efficiently and avoid disease.

Interestingly, some of the most promising superfoods have been discovered by studying ancient beliefs about indigenous plants from around the world. These ancient foods are now getting the full attention of modern research scientists. For example, acai berries (pronounced ah-sah-e), a purple berry from the rainforests of Brazil, are one of the world's richest sources of a group of antioxidants called *anthocyanins*. Scientists have demonstrated anthocyanins' broad spectrum of cancer-fighting properties. The purple power

in acai berries also shows great promise in fighting inflammation, increasing sex drive and protecting the brain from free-radical damage.

Turmeric, a traditional spice of Indian and Mediterranean cuisine, contains a plant compound called curcumin, which gives this spice its intense yellow color. Research suggests that curcumin has anti-inflammatory properties equal to cortisone; lowers cholesterol while protecting the liver (in contrast to cholesterol-lowering drugs); prevents blood clotting; and is a powerful anticancer agent.

One of the newest superfoods is the mangosteen fruit, an exotic Asian fruit with a deep purple color. Dr. Douglas Kinghorn and his team of scientists at Ohio State University have found that "the antioxidants in mangosteen are incredibly potent." Dr. Kinghorn says, "If you drink a small amount of mangosteen juice, it will have a positive effect in terms of cancer protection." Mangosteen contains xanthones, powerful antioxidants that combat inflammation and free radicals.

Goji berries, another rising superfood, are grown in the nutrient-rich soil of the Himalayas and have been used for thousands of years as a food and a medicine. Dr. Perricone, author of *The Perricone Prescription*, says that goji berries may be the only food that stimulates the production of human growth hormone, the "anti-aging hormone."

Pomegranate, the ancient fruit mentioned in Greek mythology, the Bible and the Koran, may have its origins in the ancient world, but modern science is now extolling its miraculous virtues. Scientists at the Rambam Medical Center in Israel have demonstrated that the sugars found in pomegranate juice protect against hardening of the arteries - a major cause of diabetes and heart disease. And there's a lot of good science that touts pomegranates' protective benefit against cancer, particularly prostate cancer.

Milk thistle is a remarkably safe plant that has been used for thousands of years as a food and medicine. Modern research has proven that the potent antioxidant silymarin in milk thistle is a powerful liver protector against toxins in the environment. Research has demonstrated that milk thistle and its constituents are able to regenerate the liver by producing new liver cells. New and exciting research indicates that milk thistle may be helpful in treating neurological disorders, including Alzheimer's disease. Smita Kittur, MD, reporting at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, said, "Surprisingly, we found that milk thistle extract not only helped the nerve cells to grow more neurites [branches of nerve cells necessary for their normal function and that aid in the regeneration of new cells], but it also kept the nerve cells alive longer."

Sea vegetables like dulse and *Dunaliella salina* are superfoods from the sea and are rich sources of minerals and trace minerals. In fact, seaweed contains all the minerals found in human blood, as well as other bioactive compounds that lower cholesterol, reduce blood pressure and have antioxidant activity. The Asian population, one of the healthiest on the planet, includes seaweed in its diet regularly, yet most Americans rarely take advantage of this superfood. Green tea and white tea have been popular beverages in the Asian diet for thousands of years. They contain catechins and other polyphenols that are powerful antioxidants against cancer, heart disease and strokes. "White tea and green tea may provide some of the same benefits as NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), without their adverse side effects," says Gayle Orner, PhD, a toxicologist at the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University.

Scientists are discovering endless combinations of antioxidants in whole foods that combat different types of free radicals inside and outside the body. That is why we're experiencing a major shift away from single-nutrient antioxidants (vitamin supplements) and back to whole-food supplementation. The take-home message is this: The number-one antidote to free radicals, along with the disease and accelerated aging they cause, is a wide variety of multi-colored fruits and vegetables, plus whole grains, nuts and seeds. Second, take out an insurance policy. Eating superfoods every day may be the best health insurance you can get to prevent cancer, protect the blood vessels and heart, boost the immune system, and fight the ravages of aging. That's why many chiropractors recommend that their patients take a superfood supplement every day. Today's food is tomorrow's prescription.

Here are 10 important "superfoods" to add to your daily diet, courtesy of the author and oprah.com:

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sprouts. - Copyright © Stock
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A clump of wheat grass. -
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Two red hot peppers. - Copyright
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A glass of pomegranate juice and half a
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A tin bowl full of turmeric. -
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James D. Krystosik, DC, is the author of *Carbs from Heaven*, *Carbs from Hell* and host of the weekly radio program *The Other Side of Medicine*. For more information on carbohydrates and superfoods, visit www.drgoodcarbs.com.

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