

# **Special Report**

## **Super Foods: Nutritional Powerhouses For Lifelong Health And Vitality**

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## The Humble Bean - A Super Food Leading A Double Life

There aren't a lot of foods that can hold more than one place on the food pyramid. But, long before we started talking about super foods, ancient peoples knew the benefits this humble food had to offer; as a vegetable, a protein, and a healer.

In traditional Indian medicine, there exists an ages-old system of living and healing that includes a vegetarian diet using legumes like lentils, beans, and peas to keep the body healthy. Now, beyond the Middle-Eastern cultures, many people recognize the power of the bean to support whole nutrition and well-being. Here, we discuss some of the benefits of beans, and why they are leading a double life as a well-respected super food.



### Perfect Nutrition On Many Levels

Legumes are edible seeds contained in pods, and beans are part of that family. By their very nature, beans have a convenience factor that makes them a favorite food in many parts of the world. They are generally inexpensive and store well with the potential for a long shelf life, particularly when they are dried. Beans offer sustained nutrition and energy due to the fact they have a low glycemic index, meaning they provide energy to the body over a long period of time.

You won't get bored quickly eating beans, either. There is virtually an endless variety of beans and legumes to choose from, as well as a mountain of recipes to try when adding beans to your healthy diet. A short list of beans would include navy beans, black beans, lentils, soybeans, great northern beans, mung beans, garbanzo beans, pinto beans, black-eyed peas, and kidney beans.

Beans are an excellent source of dietary fiber, minerals, and vitamins, and are naturally low in fat, calories, and sodium. You can serve beans in nutritious main dishes or side dishes that will satisfy your appetite with less-costly consequences to your body, or budget. These reasons alone would easily earn beans their super food status, but there's more!

Eating several servings of beans each day not only helps you reach your daily vegetable requirement, but those same beans also add up as your protein intake. Yes, those inexpensive, versatile beans are a protein. That's why we consider them a double-duty super food. Beans can easily be combined in recipes with other protein sources, vegetables, and starches like corn, whole wheat, or brown rice to create 'complete proteins' containing all the necessary amino acids our bodies require to function well.

## **Good Health Contributions**

Beans have numerous healthy qualities that make them excellent additions to any diet. As we mentioned, not only are beans a nutritious vegetable source, but a perfect choice as a meat substitute. By reducing high-fat protein sources like red meats in your diet, and substituting low fat beans as your source of protein, you are fighting high cholesterol, high blood pressure, as well as a host of other ailments that can occur from a diet high in fat.

Antioxidants battle those nasty free radicals, the cell damaging agents in your body, and beans have some of the highest antioxidant content of any food on the planet. Although the benefits vary between different types of beans, all beans help regulate blood pressure and blood sugar levels, lower cholesterol, and improve digestion. The dietary fiber and enzymes in beans have the added benefit of helping to block cancer-causing cells and compounds in the intestines and colon.

The humble little kidney bean contains a healthy dose of thiamin, which regulates memory and brain function. Many beans also contain isoflavones, which can ease menopause symptoms and improve bone and prostate health, just to name a few benefits. Choose any bean and you've chosen a super food well worth the title.

## **Unlimited Possibilities**

Beans can be cooked in countless dishes like chili, stew, soup, stir-fry, tacos, salads, casseroles, and omelets. Try your hand at several main dishes or side dishes and explore your options. Don't limit yourself to just the classic beans and rice dish. Choose a new salad or a tasty dip for chips. Hot, cold, mashed, or whole, the bean will constantly surprise you with its versatility.

As opposed to canned beans, dried beans are the cheapest way to have this super food on hand. In general, cooking dried beans is easy. Rinse your dried beans, cover in water and soak overnight. Then, set the beans in a big pot, cover them with fresh water, bring to a boil and simmer for about an hour or so until they are soft. You can skip soaking them overnight, just increase the cooking time to about two hours. You will also find many recipes for cooking dried beans in a crockpot or pressure cooker. Do a bit of research or follow the directions on the package of beans for best results.

No matter how you choose to eat this super food, your body will thank you. You can eat enough beans to satisfy even the heartiest appetite without worrying about fat or calories. Beans are economical, a great source of dietary fiber, and are loaded with vitamins and minerals. Besides all that good news, a bag of beans in your pantry means you've always got protein in your house, too. As far as super foods go, beans easily make it to the top of the list.

## The Boastful Blueberry – A Super Food With Bragging Rights

Blueberries are one of the super foods we hear a lot about, and with good reason. These delicious, deep blue summer berries are well known for their antioxidants, containing the highest amount of any other berries. However, blueberries have some other specific health benefits that are worth talking about. Let's take a look.

### Big Benefits In A Sweet Little Berry

The list of health benefits from eating blueberries is stacking up, and there aren't many parts of your body that couldn't benefit from a little extra blueberry goodness.

If you're looking for a low-calorie, high-fiber fruit with lots to offer your health, blueberries may be just what you need. One cup of blueberries has less than 100 calories, and offers one-quarter of your daily requirement for Vitamin C.

Loaded with vitamins and minerals, blueberries can boast about nutrients that are significant in keeping your brain healthy.

Specifically, scientists claim that blueberries maintain and restore a healthy nervous system, prevent the death of brain cells that lead to health concerns like Alzheimer's disease, and keep your memory sharp for a long time. That's a lot of brainpower.

Better vision is another benefit associated with consumption of blueberries, due to the fact that they contain compounds called anthocyanosides and flavonoids, which can slow down visual loss, as well as help prevent macular degeneration, myopia, and cataracts. Blueberries also have some heavy molecules, which can help prevent urinary tract infections by washing away harmful bacteria.

Another important antioxidant is anthocyanins, known to benefit the prevention of heart disease and good cardiovascular health. Blueberries have been found to contain even more anthocyanins than red wine, long thought to be one of the better sources of this defender against free radicals. Even hemorrhoids, varicose veins, and peptic ulcers can benefit from the antioxidants found in these super berries.

A couple interesting cautions regarding blueberries are coming to light. Apparently, the protein in milk depletes the antioxidant power of the acids contained in blueberries. One study suggests eating blueberries either one hour before or two hours after drinking milk. So, blueberries on your morning cereal may not be, nutritiously speaking, the wise thing to do. Instead, choose blueberries as a high-energy late morning snack or to top off a green salad.



Another interesting aspect of blueberries is that they contain oxalates, which can become concentrated and crystallize, creating some concern for those with a tendency for gallstones or kidney stones. As with other life choices, do all things in moderation and pay attention to allergies and other health concerns before indulging. But, for the vast majority, blueberries offer a wealth of nutrients that will benefit our health and well being.

### **How to Select and Enjoy Blueberries**

With so many health benefits, the question is not whether to eat blueberries, but how to eat them. First, you need to pick good specimens. Choose blueberries that are firm and uniform in color, not dull-looking or watery.

In fact, water will cause the berries to spoil more quickly, so they should be kept in dry containers in the refrigerator. For this reason, you'll also want to dry blueberries thoroughly after you wash them.

If you can't buy fresh, buy frozen. Blueberries freeze nicely and can be purchased whole or smashed. When you want to eat them, just thaw and enjoy. If frozen blueberries are used in cooking, you can thaw them or throw them into the recipe frozen and just adjust your cooking time slightly.

You'll find blueberry recipes in every section of a cookbook. From breakfast to breads, salads to sauces, and desserts to drinks, blueberries can be enjoyed from morning to night. Even without a cookbook handy, you can eat blueberries very simply as a 'one ingredient' super-food snack.

If you're looking for an easy to eat super-food that is loaded with not only nutrition, but also flavor and versatility, get to know this beautiful berry. Perfect as a snack, a dessert, or any number of dishes, blueberries definitely earn their place in your kitchen, and your healthy diet.

## The Broccoli Boost – A Super Food For Every Body

When former President George W. Bush made his shocking proclamation that he didn't like broccoli and that he wasn't about to eat any, you could almost hear parents across the country gasping. While some kids might have praised the proclamation as an excuse to justify their own broccoli beliefs, the popularity of broccoli has really never wavered. Parents still are finding ways to get broccoli on their kids' plates by using any means possible. Let's take a look at what this versatile vegetable has to offer.



### What's In It for Me?

Today, broccoli remains one of the best selling vegetables in America for many reasons. This low-calorie, nutrient-rich vegetable has been praised for some miraculous health benefits. This list of benefits includes fighting cancer, boosting our immune systems, building stronger bones, and lowering the risk for cataracts. Broccoli earns its distinction as one of the top super foods in diets around the world.

Broccoli is a very good source of dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin K, B6, folate, potassium and manganese. We're familiar with most of these, of course, but did you know that folate is linked to reducing birth defects and heart disease? Along with these nutrients, broccoli is also a good source of protein, vitamin E, thiamin, riboflavin, calcium, and iron.

The words super-food and antioxidant often go together, and broccoli is no exception. Rich in antioxidants, those damaging free radicals don't stand a chance against broccoli. One of those antioxidants is Q10, which helps the body produce energy. Another specific component of broccoli's superpower status involves a compound called sulforaphane, which triggers potent anti-cancer enzymes. These enzymes are also effective in eliminating bacteria that can cause peptic ulcers.

And, you don't have to eat a lot of broccoli to get all these super nutrients. Just one cup of broccoli provides over 40 milligrams of calcium and almost 80 milligrams of vitamin C. That even beats milk as a nutritional food source. All this nutrition is available in only 25 calories, plus broccoli is very low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

### Choosing the Right Bunch

Selecting fresh broccoli isn't difficult. Look for sturdy stalks with compact, dark green florets, and avoid wilted specimens with yellowing buds, as these stalks are already past their prime. Broccoli stores well in the

refrigerator for up to three days before losing its vitamin content. In some supermarkets, you will even find hybrids like broccoflower or broccolini, which combine kale or cauliflower with broccoli.

Trim any leaves from the stalk and trim the woody end of the stalk off the bottom. If you prefer to eat only the florets, or your recipe calls for just the florets, cut the broccoli florets off the stalk, rinse under running water, and drain. Save the stalks for another recipe if desired.

### **Cooking and Serving Tips**

Broccoli is one of the more versatile vegetables you can eat, holding up well in a number of recipes and cooking methods. Of course, the closer you keep your broccoli to its raw state, the more nutrients you will maintain.

If you are cooking your broccoli to serve as a side dish, you should only cook it for a few moments, until the florets turn bright green. Cooking broccoli for more time than necessary causes the nutritional benefits to deteriorate. If the broccoli becomes mushy during steaming or boiling, it's cooked too long. You may choose to flash-cook the broccoli in a microwave to keep the cooking time short and to maintain more of the nutrients. Although, the microwave debate still goes on about whether it reduces or destroys nutrients in broccoli. You decide.

Broccoli can be used in anything from stir-fry to casseroles, omelets, soups, and salads. The florets are a pretty, and nutritious, addition to many dishes. The stalks can be chopped and sautéed, roasted, or cooked and pureed for a creamy broccoli soup. You'll find thousand of recipes using broccoli once you start searching.

Of course, we can't talk about broccoli and kids without talking about broccoli trees. Raw broccoli florets look like little trees, so use this to your advantage when trying to get kids to eat their broccoli. With a bit of creamy dressing for 'snow,' make a little forest of broccoli trees and your kids will be tempted to gobble them up in no time.

It should also be noted that sprouts from broccoli have the same healthful benefits as the plant itself. Toss a handful of sprouts on top of a salad for a real boost of flavor and nutrients. Or, tuck a pile of broccoli sprouts into a tortilla wrap sandwich for a crunchy treat. Anywhere you want to add crunch, add broccoli sprouts.

No matter how you serve broccoli - raw, blanched, or steamed as a side dish, or as an ingredient in a main dish, you can't go wrong with this powerhouse vegetable. Besides the boost broccoli gives your immune system, and your overall health, broccoli is just plain tasty. This is one super food you don't want to skip.



## The Nutty News - A Super Food Headliner In A Tiny Package

Do you picture snacks helping your heart and lowering your cholesterol while filling you up between meals? Snacking has gotten a bad name through the years, mostly due to the over-abundance of pre-packaged snack foods. But, snacking doesn't have to be bad for you if you know what snacks to choose. As a matter of fact, snacking can be really good for you. Let's take a look at one healthy food that should be considered an essential snack.



### Nutrition by the Handful

That little nut you have been snacking on is really a super food because of the unique combination of fats, protein, vitamins, and minerals. This tiny powerhouse works hard lowering the risk of some significant diseases and health conditions.

Don't let the fat content or calorie count of nuts worry you too much. Even though nuts are often high in calories and fat, they have 'good' fats and omega 3 fatty acids that lower bad cholesterol levels and help regulate blood pressure and healthy heart rhythms. The fiber content in nuts also helps control cholesterol and has been found to lower the risk for diabetes.

But that's not all. Certain types of nuts also have plant sterols, which is another cholesterol inhibitor. So important as a cholesterol inhibitor, as a matter of fact, that plant sterols are added to things like orange juice and margarine for the health benefits. And you've got it all right there in a nut.

In addition, vitamin E and the amino acid L-arginine are two elements that help reduce plaque in the circulatory system, which helps to prevent clots in arteries. Nuts have so many of these healthy elements that they may be one of the most powerful food you can eat to take care of your heart.

### Enjoy Nuts in Numerous Ways

The important thing to remember with nuts is, like many other things in life, too much of a good thing isn't really good. Since nuts are dense in calories and fat, a little goes a long way. For instance, just a dozen or so cashews can have up to 180 calories. For this reason, health experts recommend limiting your daily intake of most nuts to no more than a couple of ounces. This is actually good news for your budget, since adding nuts to your healthy diet requires only a small investment for such a big return.

So, what specific nuts are best to eat regularly? There isn't really a lot of definitive research to suggest one type of nut is better than another. Walnuts, almonds, peanuts, and cashews are popular and easy to find in most regions. You'll also find many recipes for these particular nuts, so it's easy to incorporate nuts into your meals as well as your snacking.

Consider substituting chopped nuts for the chocolate chips in cookies, for example. Toss peanuts into a green salad or pasta salad for added nutrition and crunch. Use natural peanut butter on your morning toast instead of butter or jam. Walnuts are a classic choice to top a savory salad. Chop almonds up and toss in your vanilla yogurt for a nice crunch.

You can also grind almonds, peanuts, or other nuts into a coarse meal. Use this meal to coat chicken or fish instead of using cornmeal or flour when frying or baking. Grind the meal fine and add to smoothies in your blender. Almonds can be ground into a flour consistency and can be used in many dishes as a substitute for wheat flour. This gluten-free flour alternative has become very popular in recent years.

It's best to buy shelled, unsalted, or minimally processed varieties of nuts in small quantities. You can also protect fresh nuts from oxidation by storing them in a cool, dark, dry place. Or you can store nuts in an airtight container in the refrigerator or freezer. The oils that naturally occur in nuts can become rancid if exposed to heat and air.

Adding small amounts of nuts to your diet will provide your body with big benefits. Choose a variety of nuts, store them properly, and enjoy a handful of crunchy nutrition every day.

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