

Power Foods for Healthy Aging

You've heard it before – “we are what we eat” – and nowhere is this more true than in the relationship between our food choices and our rate of aging.

Too many refined carbohydrates, too few brightly colored fruits and vegetables, and too much of the wrong types of fats can all accelerate the cellular aging process.

The flip side of the message that “bad food ages us faster” is that the “right” foods can actually slow the aging process through improved control of blood sugar, inflammation, and other biochemical processes that lead to cellular damage when unchecked.

Perhaps the best news of all is that adding “anti-aging” power foods is both easy and delicious – see below for some suggestions.

Black Beans - beans are the cornerstone food for the longest-lived populations on the planet. All types of beans are extremely healthy because they provide special support for the digestive tract with high levels of **protein** and both **soluble and insoluble fiber** (which reduces colon cancer risk and increases production of butyric acid by beneficial bacteria). Black beans in particular are also extremely high in flavonoids, anthocyanins, chlorogenic acid, and other metabolism-enhancing phytonutrients with benefits for obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Black beans also have a “magical” protein/fiber ratio = One cup of black beans has 15g of fiber and 15g of protein.

Fatty Fish – like mackerel, bluefish, wild salmon, and tuna are rich in **omega-3 fatty acids** that improve circulation, reduce inflammation, and reduce the risk of heart disease. Unfortunately, fish sticks, fried fish, and many low-fat white fish (including many types of farmed salmon) do not contain appreciable amounts of omega-3 fatty acids – so choose the fattier more flavorful options.

Whole Grains – are an excellent source of **B-complex vitamins**, especially thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin which are essential for optimal energy metabolism and are needed at higher levels during periods of elevated stress. Eating more whole grains (whole wheat bread) in preference to refined grains (white bread) not only gives you more B-complex vitamins, but the added fiber slows carbohydrate digestion and absorption and helps to control blood sugar (which is good for mental and physical energy levels).

Dairy – is the richest dietary source of two anti-aging nutrients, **Calcium** and **Vitamin D**. You already know that calcium and vitamin D are important for

bone health, but calcium also helps to boost metabolic rate (increasing the number of calories you burn each day) and Vitamin D delivers potent anti-cancer activity and mood support. Dairy foods such as chocolate milk and fruit yogurt are also rich sources of protein ("fast" absorbing whey and "slow" absorbing casein) and carbohydrates ("fast" absorbing sucrose/fructose and "slow" absorbing lactose).

Green Leafy Vegetables – like spinach and kale are a terrific source of Fiber, Calcium, and **Carotenoids** such as beta-carotene, which is an important antioxidant that is especially effective in protecting skin from damaging ultraviolet radiation.

Berries – including blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries are rich in antioxidant nutrients called **Flavonoids**. Thousands of research studies has associated higher flavonoid intakes with reduced risks for heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Green Tea – is a rich source of two health-protecting nutrients, **Catechins** and **Theanine**. The anti-cancer effects of catechins (a type of flavonoid) are almost unmatched in the natural world (turmeric comes close – see below) – with dozens of human studies showing a reduced risk of a variety of cancers in those who drink the most tea (4-10 cups daily). Theanine is an amino acid naturally found in tea leaves that provides an anti-stress relaxation benefit to tea drinkers. The presence of theanine in green tea is thought to be responsible for the observation that caffeine intake in coffee drinkers (without theanine) is more apt to result in tension as opposed to the "relaxed alertness" more common to tea drinkers (despite similar caffeine intake).

Turmeric, Curcumin, and Ginger – can indeed be considered the "spices of life" because of their profound anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory activities. So famously used in spicy Indian and Thai dishes each of these spices and their active compounds, **Turmerones**, **Curcuminoids**, and **Gingerols**, have been associated with generalized anti-inflammatory effects throughout the body and with specific prevention and accelerated healing of cancers of the mouth, throat, and gastrointestinal tract.

Citrus Fruit – you already know citrus as a rich source of Vitamin C (ascorbic acid), but you might not know that oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, and lemons are a superior source of Vitamin C compared to isolated supplements because that C is balanced with Flavonoids (see Berries above) which add to the antioxidant benefits of vitamin C and actually help vitamin C protect cells better and for longer. In addition, the underside of citrus peels (the "white

stuff" on the inside of an orange) is a source of specialized flavonoids known as **PMFs** (Poly-Methoxylated-Flavones) that have been shown to reduce cortisol (a stress hormone) and cholesterol levels – thus providing protection from both stress and heart disease.

Red Grapes / Red Wine – are good sources of **Resveratrol**, yet another type of flavonoid, found in the skins of red grapes. Animal studies have shown that diets containing small amounts of resveratrol on a daily basis (a little bit, everyday, over a long period of time) are associated with a unique set of anti-aging benefits including improved heart health, better blood sugar control, and longer lifespan. However, studies of resveratrol supplements (high doses delivered over short periods of time) have shown the opposite effects - with increased levels of cellular stress and faster rates of metabolic aging (suggesting that lower "dietary" intakes of certain phytonutrients are actually superior for health compared to higher "pharmacological" levels).

About the Author: Shawn Talbott holds an MS in exercise science (UMass Amherst) and a PhD in nutritional biochemistry (Rutgers). Dr. Talbott is the author of 13 books, including the recent "Best Future You" about the effects of cellular stress on aging and well-being (and how to reduce cellular stress to look, feel, and perform your best). He runs a successful lifestyle program near Salt Lake City, Utah. Additional anti-aging diet tips (and recipes) are available free at <http://BestFutureYou.com>