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24 Power Foods For Older Adults

*An Orange Paper from Mather LifeWays
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The old saying, “you are what you eat” makes more sense today than ever before. By paying attention to what you consume, health care professionals say it’s possible to reduce your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer. Different conditions may require modification of your diet to prolong your life and fight disease progression.

If you’re in a diet rut, modifying your own menu can be one of the easiest, least expensive ways to feel better and enjoy a full and active lifestyle.

The first and most important step before undertaking a diet change is to talk with your health care provider, who will discuss your general health related to diet and will recommend resources you can tap into, including a consultation with a registered dietician. And, just like what your mother told you years ago, the first advice you are likely to hear is that moderation is the key to good health.

HEADLINE WORTHY

Not long ago, the chances were slim that a food- or health-related study in a scientific journal would make the evening news or greet readers in their morning newspapers. Now, hardly a week goes by when a breaking dietary story doesn’t make headlines. This is because public interest in nutrition and food safety has increased dramatically. While food stories make for compelling news, all of the surveys, stories and media coverage has not brought a clear direction for consumers to follow. For example, “new and improved” may not always be the right choice, even if a manufacturer says so on its package.

KICK IT INTO HEALTHY GEAR

Your health professional will tell you that variety and experimentation can make nutrition fun, as well as good for you. While most dietary plans tell you what you can’t eat (usually your favorite foods!), the most powerful nutrition strategy focuses on what you can and should eat. In fact, research has shown that adding certain foods to your diet is just as important as cutting back on others.

- 1) Whole Grains – for general protection: oats, whole wheat, brown rice, bulgur and bran
 - University of Minnesota research showed that three daily servings helped reduced risk of

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- o heart disease by 25-36%
 - o stroke by 37%
 - o diabetes by 21-27%
 - Added bonus: whole grains fill you up fast so you are less likely to overeat
 - Look for “whole” grain on labels
- 2) Cherries – for natural pain relief
 - Reduces the level of c-reactive protein (CRP), which is produced in the body in response to acute inflammation like that experienced by arthritis sufferers
 - 3) Yogurt – for boosting immunity
 - Source of probiotics, “friendly” bacteria that fight illness and disease
 - Research found that eating yogurt helped the body’s ability to fight off pneumonia
 - Look for yogurt containing “live” or “active” cultures
 - 4) Salmon – for bones
 - Source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are thought to help preserve bone density
 - May reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and help prevent heart disease
 - May also fight prostate cancer, depression/mood disorders and reduce arthritis pain
 - Alternative sources: cold-water fish, including sardines, tuna and mackerel
 - Caution: mercury levels in some fish mean being careful about where the fish comes from, the type of fish being eaten and eating in moderation: about one 3-ounce fillet or can of fish/week
 - 5) Cabbage – for breast cancer protection
 - Research on women eating cabbage and sauerkraut (fermented cabbage) four or more times a week found that they were 74% less likely to develop breast cancer (American Association for Cancer Research)
 - May also protect against lung, stomach and colon cancers
 - 6) Walnuts – for the heart
 - Good source of omega-3 fatty acid, which may reduce the risk of heart disease and high blood pressure
 - Research on Japanese men and women eating 1/4-1/3 cup of walnuts per day found they lowered their “bad” cholesterol by up to 10%
 - Other nuts: almonds and pistachios also high in arginine, an amino acid that may increase blood flow to the heart
 - Caution: use moderation, as nuts are high in fat and calories

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- 7) Blueberries – for cognitive health
 - Blueberries were best of 40 fruits and veggies studied for level of antioxidants, which fight disease
 - A half-cup is only 40 calories, has almost no fat, plenty of vitamin C, and two grams of fiber
 - May also decrease brain damage from stroke and effects of Alzheimer's or dementia
 - They protect cells from damage and may restore cells to healthy levels
- 8) Beans – to fight colon cancer
 - Good source of protein and antioxidants and provide plenty of fiber, which may prevent colon cancer
 - Recent study of protein-rich diet (50% of which came from plant sources such as beans) showed decreased blood pressure and “bad” cholesterol, lowering risk of heart disease by 21%
 - Any beans will work; two to four servings a week is recommended
- 9) Tomatoes – for prostate health
 - Regular consumption of tomatoes can decrease risk of prostate cancer by up to 35%
 - Tomatoes also may help men already diagnosed with prostate cancer; University of Illinois at Chicago researchers studied men with prostate cancer who ate tomato sauce every day for three weeks and found their PSA levels decreased by 20%
 - Tomatoes contain lycopene, another antioxidant thought to protect against lung and stomach cancers
 - Cooked tomatoes may have more potency than fresh ones!
- 10) Peanut Butter – for protection against diabetes and heart disease
 - Consists of mono- and polyunsaturated fats found in many nuts
 - Can improve glucose and insulin stability
 - Also a good source of fiber, which prevents cholesterol from entering bloodstream and speeds it through the digestive tract, keeping you regular
 - Caution: use in moderation (one tablespoon a day), as it is high in calories and total fat
- 11) Avocado – for protection against heart attacks
 - Most of the fat from avocados is unsaturated
 - Plenty of fiber, vitamins C, B6, and folate, which neutralizes homocysteine and decreases the risk of heart attacks
 - Smooth-skinned Florida avocados may have less fat and calories than Californian avocados

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- 12) Chili Peppers – for burning calories
 - The ingredient that makes peppers hot, capsaicin, helps suppress appetite
 - It also stimulates your metabolism, so you burn more calories
 - Peppers also clear the sinuses and are good for congestion
 - They provide vitamins C, A, and other antioxidants
 - Try a little powder in soups, sauces and other dishes – experiment carefully!
- 13) Watermelon – for prostate health
 - Like tomatoes, watermelons have even more lycopene, which helps fight prostate cancer
 - It may also help block plaque from accumulating in arteries, which reduces the risk of heart attack
- 14) Apples – for protecting the lungs
 - More effective than other fruits and vegetables in fighting lung disease
 - Research found smokers less likely to develop emphysema and bronchitis on an apple-a-day diet
 - Apples have only about 80 calories, little fat and plenty of fiber (a special type of which, pectin, helps to lower cholesterol and control blood sugar)
 - They also have the mineral boron, which is thought to boost alertness and reduce the risk of osteoporosis
 - An apple a day really can keep the doctor away!
- 15) Eggs – for fighting eye disease and possibly lowering cholesterol
 - They are low in saturated fat and a good source of lutein, which may help prevent age-related macular degeneration
 - Egg yolks do contain cholesterol, but new research says it has an ingredient that slows cholesterol absorption
 - Caution: eat in moderation and consult your doctor and/or dietitian
- 16) Turmeric – for fighting cancer and reducing pain and swelling
 - A spice that adds some zip and color (yellow) to foods
 - It may ease arthritis and muscle (even post-operative) pain
 - Try using it sparingly to replace salt and pepper in your cooking
- 17) Flaxseed – for protection against heart disease and constipation
 - Rich in fiber, which can help keep you regular
 - May also ease inflammation and improve mood
 - Grind them before eating to get maximum benefit
 - Sprinkle on oatmeal, yogurt, or use in cookies
- 18) Garlic – for the promotion of good circulation and lowering cholesterol
 - Research shows that garlic also may help fight colon cancer

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- 19) Ginger – for dealing with nausea
 - Considered helpful in fighting morning sickness and queasy stomachs
 - May also help lower blood pressure and increase circulation
- 20) White and Green Tea – for fighting disease
 - Tea contains polyphenols, which are phytochemicals that fight cancer-causing free radicals
 - May also boost metabolism
- 21) Mangoes – for fighting cancer
 - Best fruit source of carotenoids, which appear to fight cancer
 - Other related fruits include apricots and cantaloupe
 - Good source of fiber
 - Ever try a mango shake? Delicious!
- 22) Papaya – for boosting immunity
 - Full of beta-carotene and vitamin C, which boost the immune system
 - May also ease inflammation (arthritis)
 - Could also help heal wounds and tissue injuries
- 23) Red Grapes – for a healthy heart
 - The French Paradox: How do some French people, who eat foods high in fat, have low risk of heart disease?
 - Red grapes (and red wine) contain polyphenols, which are thought to help fight heart disease
- 24) Tempeh – for heart health
 - A thin cake of fermented soybean
 - Similar to tofu
 - Research shows it lowers LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and triglycerides
 - May also help with symptoms of menopause and osteoporosis
 - Used in recipes in place of meats; barbecued tempeh has a great nutty and tangy taste

Navigating the path to better eating is not all paved with sharp turns and dead-ends. It starts with common sense, willingness to experiment and the help and support of your health care provider.

Healthy eating also is an opportunity to expand your range of choices by trying a variety of foods that you don't normally eat, like these Power Foods. A healthy diet doesn't have to mean eating foods that are bland or unappealing! Healthy eating increases energy, improves the way your body functions, strengthens your immune system and stops weight gain.

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One great resource for summaries of topical health and aging articles is aging in action. Published by Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, the monthly e-newsletter comprises recent research findings by medical and social scientists about issues related to health, health services, aging and family caregiving. To learn more, visit <http://matherlifeways.com/insitute>.



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Mather LifeWays is a unique nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age Well.SM For more information about our senior living residences, Community Initiatives, or award-winning research, please visit our website at www.matherlifeways.com or call (847) 492.7500.