



TOP 15 SUPER FOODS

Many people assume that all athletes eat a nutritious or well balanced diet with lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, lean meats, and whole grains, while never touching New Orleans' fried seafood. Many do eat well, but the number that don't take care of their bodies with good nutrition is quite alarming. As an athlete, not only will you maximize your performance with quality nutrition, you will also maximize your health by adding years to your life. Below is a list of 15 super foods for athletes. These foods contain the necessary nutrients, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents, and anti-cancer properties to improve athletic performance, enhance recovery, minimize muscle damage, improve strength, decrease body fat, build lean muscle, and most importantly, improve overall health.

1 OATMEAL

Oatmeal is a heart healthy whole grain that contains valuable soluble fiber to help soak up unwanted fat and cholesterol in the bloodstream. But perhaps even more importantly, it's packed

full of good carbohydrates – the most critical energy source for athletes. Oatmeal maintains your energy for a longer period of time during your workout and curbs appetite by slowing the absorption of glucose into your bloodstream.

2 NON-FAT PLAIN OR GREEK YOGURT

Yogurt is a well-known source of calcium, which supports healthy bones and reduces the risk of osteoporosis. But did you know that calcium also plays a role in muscle metabolism? Yogurt also contains live active cultures of bacteria that encourage the growth of “good” bacteria and inhibit the growth of the “bad.” This also helps the body fight cancer, allergies, diarrhea, and symptoms of IBS. Eating plain yogurt can create unusual facial expressions, so add a little sugar free pancake syrup or honey to give it an excellent taste.

3 BLUEBERRIES

This super fruit is full of nutrients and one of the best overall foods due to its antioxidant properties. They can help to reduce oxidative damage to cells resulting from free radicals produced during periods of strenuous activity. Nutrients in blueberries may also promote healthy blood pressure while also containing vitamin C to support your immune system. They are also a source of slow acting carbohydrates and fiber to help sustain your energy to maximize performance.

4 CANNED PUMPKIN

The unique thing about pumpkin is its blend of phytonutrients as it contains the richest supply of carotenoids (orange pigment in plants). You may assume pumpkin contains a lot of sugar due to an affiliation with pumpkin pie, but canned pumpkin actually contains only 40 calories and 5 grams of fiber per half cup. In addition, 1 serving contains 3 times your recommended daily allowance for vitamin A. Use it to make a low sugar pumpkin

pie (with Splenda) or mix with a sugar free pudding and skim milk to your preferred consistency.

5 WILD SALMON

Salmon is a source of high quality protein, iron, and vitamin B12 – which is important for optimal athletic performance. It also contains omega 3 fatty acids, which act as an anti-inflammatory agent and may reduce muscle soreness and pain. The nutritional fats found in salmon have been shown in epidemiological and clinical trials to reduce the incidence of heart disease. Have a little sushi with wild salmon 2-3 days a week to obtain your omega 3's.

6 WHEY & CASEIN PROTEINS

Fast (whey) and slow (casein) acting protein powders have completely opposite effects for muscle recovery and growth. Studies have demonstrated that blood amino acid levels are low in the morning and immediately after a workout. Consuming a liquid beverage or powder with whey protein isolate optimizes blood amino acid levels immediately after a workout but returns to baseline levels within 2 hours. It's best to use whey protein in the morning, before, and after a workout to minimize muscle breakdown and increase muscle recovery. Casein protein (i.e. cottage cheese) maintains blood amino acid levels for 6-8 hours after consumption and is more advantageous to consume 60-90 minutes before bed time to minimize muscle breakdown while sleeping.

7 CHOCOLATE MILK

Did you know consuming 12-16 ounces of chocolate milk post workout, especially an intense weight lifting session, is as beneficial as consuming a commercial protein and carbohydrate beverage? Chocolate milk contains a similar amino acid profile as a commercial protein beverage in addition to a 4:1 ratio of carbohydrates to protein, which has been demonstrated to be the ideal ratio in scientific research to enhance muscle glycogen and recovery. In addition, it contains a nice blend of the electrolytes sodium and potassium for hydration. Finally, it's packed with vitamin D and calcium, it tastes great and is an inexpensive and effective beverage to enhance recovery. Consume 12-16 ounces after your strength training workout.

8 SPINACH

This is another vegetable that contains a synergy of nutrients and phytonutrients for optimal health. Spinach contains carotenoids such as beta-carotene and zeaxanthin, along with the antioxidants CoQ10 and glutathione. In addition, it also contains alpha-lipoic acid, which helps control blood sugar. The nutrients in this vegetable have been demonstrated in research to lower your risk of macular degeneration, lower homocysteine

levels, neural tube defects in pregnant women, and most cancers. Add it to your salad, include it in your omelet, add it 2-3 minutes before you finish cooking a piece of chicken or turkey.

9 CRUCIFEROUS VEGETABLES (BROCCOLI, CAULIFLOWER, CABBAGE)

Parents have always encouraged or maybe tried to force children to eat their broccoli. They were absolutely right. A study at Johns Hopkins University demonstrated broccoli consumption prevented the development of tumors by 60% and reduced the size of tumors that did develop by 75%. It is an excellent source of vitamins C and K and a good source of folate and vitamin A. Most importantly, it contains more polyphenols than most if not all vegetables and possesses anti-inflammatory properties to minimize arthritis, muscle soreness, muscle damage, and chronic pain.

10 OMEGA 3 EGGS

A recent study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition indicated eggs boost HDL (good cholesterol) and large particle LDL (this is good). Choose eggs rich in omega 3 fatty acids (i.e. Egglands Best). For the athlete, eggs pack a variety of nutrients from B12, riboflavin, selenium, phosphorus, and most importantly, protein. Actually, eggs rank the highest on the protein digestibility and amino acid score chart, indicating all protein from eggs is absorbed. They are an excellent source of the branched chain amino acid (BCAA) leucine, the most important amino acid for signaling protein synthesis (muscle repair).

11 WALNUTS

Walnuts are a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids (alpha linoleic acid), which act as an anti-inflammatory agent. They're also high in plant sterols, which reduce cholesterol. In addition, walnuts are an excellent source of the amino acid arginine, which acts as a vasodilator for the blood vessels which keep them smooth by improving blood flow. They're also the nut with the highest anti-oxidant status and are rich in copper and magnesium.

12 SWEET POTATO

This is one of the most versatile starchy vegetables to use in the cooking process, as you could offer it as a pie, soup, fries, chips, pancakes, and many other recipes. This nutrient-dense super food contains more of the antioxidant beta carotene than any other fruit or vegetable. They are also a source of vitamin C and one of the only fat-free sources of vitamin E. Of course, vitamins C and E both have antioxidant properties and aid in muscle recovery among athletes. In addition, they are an excellent source of iron, which is important

in oxygen production for athletes during a workout.

13 EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

There are so many different types of oil available in the grocery store, but one sets itself apart from the others in regards to quality, health benefits, and versatility. Extra virgin olive oil is clearly the winner. 72% of the fat in olive oil comes from heart healthy monounsaturated fats. Extra virgin olive oil is the least processed type compared to virgin, pure, or extra light olive oil. Studies have demonstrated that extra virgin olive oil offers protection against heart disease by controlling LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels while raising HDL (the "good" cholesterol) levels. Especially for the endurance and ultra-endurance athlete, a higher fat diet may minimize the utilization of carbohydrates for energy and increase endurance performance. For the power athlete, a healthy balance of fat maintains or stimulates testosterone production for optimal muscle growth. Pour some on your salad, meat, or vegetables to get the most out of its nutritional benefits.

14 EXTRA LEAN PROTEIN

There are a variety of lean meats available for athletes to choose from but the top lean sources of protein are 96% ground beef, flank steak, chicken breast, turkey breast, buffalo, and ostrich. All are much lower or very low in saturated fat. In addition, most contain zinc, selenium, vitamins B12 and B6, and iron. Protein has many functions, such as collagen and tissue repair, repair of muscle tissue post exercise, and increasing the hormone leptin, which signals fullness.

15 SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS

Mushrooms contain essential amino acids, a variety of vitamins, and zinc, but what's unique about shiitake mushrooms are their anti-cancer and anti-viral properties by significantly boosting the immune system. Shiitake extract, called lentinan, has demonstrated positive effects on the liver, stomach, lung, bowel, and ovarian cancers. Lentinan stimulates the production of T lymphocytes and natural killer cells providing defense from free radicals and toxins to the immune system. You might ask how this relates to athletics. A healthier athlete is a more productive athlete. If mushrooms are your least favorite vegetable, hide them in your omelet or take 1000 mg of shiitake mushroom extract.

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