

NUTRITION

You'll leek
this one

22 Power Foods

You Didn't See Coming

Kale, you're benched. It's time to update your plate with these super-fresh picks

By Troy Da Costa





If you've got a strong appetite for nutritional knowledge, you've come to the right place. We've consulted the experts and trawled through the science to compile this list of foods that deserve pride of place in your shop. These certified health-enhancers will liven up your daily menu and benefit both body and brain, without emptying your wallet.

Can-do attitude



01 Black Garlic

Once niche, now everywhere – as a sauce, in supplement form or as sweet 'snacking' cloves – black garlic's antioxidant activity rockets during fermentation, reports research by Korea's Kyung Hee University. Compounds like alkaloids and flavonoids have huge benefits, including reducing the inflammation that can impair brain function.



02 TINNED TOMATOES

"Lycopene and other carotenoids found in tomatoes may reduce the harmful effects of UV rays," explains registered nutritionist Kirsten Brooks. "Opt for plum tomatoes, as they contain more phytonutrients." Cooked beats raw for bioavailability.

03 CRICKETS

As well as a solution to our over-reliance on animal protein, crickets have legs as a legit superfood. They're a source of muscle-supporting nutrients such as magnesium, calcium, zinc, copper and iron, and contain the prebiotic chitin, which promotes a healthy gut.

04 CELERIAC PUREE

It's a great source of vitamin K, "which is associated with strong bones", says Brooks, thereby reducing your risk of a training-related mishap. Moderating your carb or kilojoule intake? Sub it in for your usual rice or spuds, she suggests.

05
King Oyster Mushroom

These mighty fungi contain beta-glucans, which are “known for their immune-modulating properties, helping to protect from disease. They might benefit heart health, too,” says nutritionist and functional medicine practitioner Libby Linford.

06
Ostrich Steak

“It’s comparable to beef in many ways,” says PT Adnan Chowdhury, dishing up B12, iron and zinc. “Ostrich might help to boost blood oxygen delivery and muscle mass in athletes,” he suggests. It’s lean, too.

07
PLANTAIN

Add this African and Latin staple to your post-gym carb repertoire. Chowdhury – also a lecturer at the University of East London – points to plantain’s impressive vitamin C content. It’s also a strong source of fibre, magnesium and potassium. Grill on a barbecue or peel and roast in the oven.

08
OXTAIL

Give your next stew a meaty upgrade. “Oxtail is a source of calcium, essential to keep bones strong, while its selenium is an antioxidant,” says Chowdhury. It’s popular with athletes due to its ability to support muscle elasticity, he adds.

09
PURPLE POTATOES

Admittedly, their USP is that they look cool in photos, but these amethyst-like tubers have nutritional merits, too. “Anthocyanins cause the purple pigment in foods,” says nutrition therapist and lifestyle coach Kazuwa Mandikate. “These antioxidants have been shown to support neurological health.”

10

ONSEN TAMAGO

Scorching your eggs can reduce their nutrient content. These Japanese 'hot spring eggs' are cooked low and slow, resulting in a custardy texture – and preserving their amino acids, vitamin D and carotenoids. Boil a litre of water, turn off the heat, add 200ml cold water, 2 eggs and cover for 12 minutes.



11

SAFFRON

There's a reason we all feel better after a good curry. Studies have shown that the Persian spice contains compounds associated with better mental health. "It may improve mood by increasing the action of the neurotransmitter serotonin, and by reducing the impact of chronic stress on the brain," suggests Brooks.



12

SOUR EGGPLANT

"Fermented vegetables – also referred to as fizzy vegies – can be great for gut health," says Linford. But if you're hungry for more options than sauerkraut and kimchi, try this eastern European alternative. What's more, eggplant "is rich in fibre, as well as antioxidants that help limit oxidative stress", Linford adds.

13

LOW-ABV BEER

Yes, they're everywhere right now, but your 0.5 per cent brew has benefits beyond keeping you fit for the Friday work catch-up. Researchers at Spain's University of Extremadura found a bottle a night reduced anxiety and improved sleep in stressed workers. It's thought that hops raise levels of the 'calming' brain chemical GABA.

14

Swiss Cheese

It seems 2020 wasn't all bad news: a study from Iowa State University correlated cheese intake with protection against cognitive decline – "a pleasant surprise", the scientists said. The Swiss variety is rich in protein and useful probiotics.



15

Kiwi Fruit

Oranges may be the vit C OG, but they're not the superior source: a single kiwi packs more than your RDI for the vit. "Consuming two before bed may even improve sleep quality," says Brooks. Indeed, a small Taipei Medical University study found that participants who did this fell asleep more quickly than usual and increased their total sleep time.



16

Yuzu

Look out for this mandarin-sized Asian fruit on menus and supermarket shelves. "The flavonoids hesperidin and naringin, found in its skin and flesh, may reduce excess blood clotting, which is linked with a higher risk of heart disease and stroke," says Brooks.



"Ahead of a game, I love eating a banana. Before and after training or a game, I do a lot of stretching and get a massage as well. As part of Japanese culture, we also take hot baths a lot and use baths as part of our recovery."

– MAKI TAKADA, TEAM JAPAN

17

BROAD BEANS

A top source of copper and manganese, which support blood-sugar management. Eat yours in the form of ful medames – a traditional Egyptian breakfast dish with cumin, herbs, lemon and chilli. “It’s a great source of plant-based protein and fibre,” says Linford.

18

LEEKS

When it comes to the allium family, onion and garlic hog all the glory. They shouldn’t: leeks contain the same heart-healthy, anti-inflammatory compounds, says Mandikate. “They’re a great addition to soups.” Leeks also contain a substance called kaempferol, which has been linked to a reduced cancer risk.

19

ARTICHOKES

A nutritional powerhouse, artichokes “contain folate, vitamins K and C and are a great source of fibre”, says Mandikate. Their cynarin content also helps to break down fats. Skip the prep work and buy tinned then add to any meat or pasta dish.



20

WHOLE MILK

“Since the 1980s, the concern regarding whole milk has been its fat content, but in a 2012 meta-analysis, scientists failed to find any convincing observational research linking dairy fat to heart disease or obesity,” says Chowdhury. It’s also a cheap post-workout drink. “Research shows its 3:1 ratio of carbohydrate to proteins is effective for recovery.”

21

Fresh Figs

“They’re a powerhouse of minerals,” says Linford, “which may help to control blood pressure, as well as being rich in fibre for healthy bowel function.” As a snack, figs can be so-so. But combine them with rocket, feta and balsamic... *bellissimo*.

22

Anchovy Paste

“A rich source of the omega-3 fatty acids, anchovies are associated with heart and brain health, and contain helpful minerals, too,” says Linford. Not keen on seeing these bad boys in your Caesar salads or pizza toppings? Buy anchovies as a paste and add a squeeze to sauces for a salty, umami kick. **WH**