

Superfoods.

A 'Superfood' is a marketing term used to describe foods with supposed super health benefits. However, there's no official definition of a 'superfood' and the EU has banned health claims on packaging unless supported by scientific evidence. The term is not in common use by dietitians and nutrition scientists, many of whom dispute that particular foods have the health benefits often claimed by their advocates.



‘Superfoods’ – caution!

Making healthy lifestyle choices, including diet, can reduce our risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke and cancer. The superfood trend exploits that fact as the food industry seeks to persuade us that eating some foods can boost us physically and mentally.

Cancer Research UK notes that superfoods are often promoted as having an ability to prevent or cure diseases, including cancer. They advise caution and state that superfoods cannot substitute a generally healthy and balanced diet.

Popular so-called ‘superfoods’.

The NHS and the British Dietetic Association teamed up to look at some popular superfoods:

- **Blueberries** – valued for their high levels of antioxidants, blueberries are low in calories, high in nutrients and are a great addition to breakfast cereal and yogurt.
- **Goji berries** – these products can be expensive so it's more cost effective to eat a range of fruit and vegetables than to spend money on this one item.
- **Oily fish** – if there's one food that's good for your heart, it's oily fish. Benefits of eating at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily, include keeping your blood pressure at a healthy level, which reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease: the biggest killer in the UK.
- **Wheatgrass** – whilst there's no sound evidence that wheatgrass is any better nutritionally than other fruits and vegetables, it does count towards your recommended intake of daily fruit and veg (although a shot of wheatgrass doesn't count as one of your 5 a day).
- **Green tea** – whilst the evidence of green tea's health benefits is inconclusive, as a social drink it can continue to be enjoyed.
- **Broccoli** – a good source of vitamin C and folate, which is a naturally occurring folic acid. Broccoli is a member of the cruciferous vegetables family which, according to a report by the World Cancer Research Fund, all contain compounds that are linked to improving the body's ability to impede the growth of cancer cells.

- **Garlic** – useful in cooking as a good alternative to salt. Eating less salt is important for avoiding high blood pressure.
- **Beetroot** – a good source of iron and folate, beetroot, along with other green leafy vegetables, cabbage and celery, is very useful as part of a balanced diet as their nitrate content may help to reduce blood pressure.

The importance of a balanced diet.

Alison Hornby of the BDA advises that all unprocessed food from the major food groups could be considered ‘super’. All these foods are useful as part of a balanced diet.

Visit the Live Well section at www.nhs.uk for more information on healthy eating.

The Mediterranean diet.

The Mediterranean diet has been linked with good health, including a healthier heart. This diet includes plenty of fruit and vegetables, legumes, nuts, beans, cereals, grains, fish and unsaturated fats such as olive oil. It usually includes a low intake of meat and dairy.



No food, including those labelled ‘superfoods’, can compensate for unhealthy eating.

Alison Hornby.

Dietitian and spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association