

FOODS THAT HEAL

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(Author of HYPERLINK "<http://www.healthy.net/sqlbook/Cart.asp?ItemNumber=0375751394>" ~~Power Healing: Use The New Integrated Medicine to Heal Yourself~~, Random House, 1997)

Study after study has found that vitamin and mineral supplements improve the immune function of elderly Americans. The specific nutrients with the most profound effects on immune function are EFAs, protein, zinc, vitamin A, vitamin B6, folic acid and iron. Among the healthy elderly, immune boosting benefits have been demonstrated for anti-oxidants like zinc, selenium, vitamin E and beta-carotene.

Detoxifying Foods

Protection against the effects of environmental pollution, free-radical induced cell damage and cancer is provided by dietary anti-oxidants. Foods that are richest in these anti-oxidants are red, yellow and green vegetables, uncooked nuts and seeds (like almonds and sunflower seeds), and fish.

The appetizing colors of fresh fruits and vegetables derive from the presence of special groups of anti-oxidants. Carotenoids are fat-soluble compounds, which range in hue from light yellow to deep orange. The flagship carotenoid is beta-carotene, the orange pigment evident in carrots and cantaloupe. In the body, beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A, but the importance of carotenoids for human health extends far beyond beta-carotene's role as a precursor of vitamin A. Dietary supplements of beta-carotene are ineffective in preventing cancer or heart disease, whereas food that is high in beta-carotene and other carotenoids does confer protection.

Scientists have previously paid insufficient attention to these other carotenoids, like alpha-carotene, lutein, lycopene and the xanthins. They do not serve as precursors of vitamin A, yet their consumption may be as effective as consumption of beta-carotene in decreasing the risk of cancer, probably because they exert significant anti-oxidant effects of their own. I do not recommend nutritional supplements containing beta-carotene to my patients. Instead, I recommend a diet high in mixed carotenoids, which includes many different varieties of fruits and vegetables: carrots, broccoli, spinach, tomatoes, winter squash and papaya. Sea vegetables like kelp, wakame, dulse, hiziki and nori are especially rich in mixed carotenoids. They can be quite tasty cooked or raw, along with rice or beans or in salad.

The darker colors of fruits and vegetables are supplied by a group of compounds called bioflavonoids, which typically range from bright yellow to deep purple in hue. There are over four hundred bioflavonoids in the human diet. They are widely distributed in fruits, vegetables, beverages and spices. A typical North American consumes about one gram of bioflavonoids per day; Asians may consume over five grams per day, much of it coming from herbs and spices. Bioflavonoids are potent anti-oxidants that not only contribute to the health benefits of fruits and vegetables but also to the therapeutic effects of many traditional Chinese and Indian herbal remedies. The bioflavonoids, which give grapes their purple color, are believed responsible for the protection against heart disease, which is offered by red wine. Epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), the bioflavonoid, which is the main constituent of green tea, is credited with the protection against cancer that results from drinking green tea.

A number of foods stimulate the body to produce more of the enzymes used for detoxicating the body from cancer-causing chemicals. These foods have been shown to improve liver detoxification and to decrease the risk of developing cancer. They include members of the cabbage family (crucifers), which includes not only cabbage but also broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy and Brussels sprouts, and also green onions and kale. These vegetables contain compounds called aryl isothiocyanates, which directly stimulate the activity of an enzyme, glutathione S-transferase, an important component of the Phase Two system. Activation of liver detoxification probably explains the highly publicized effects of broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cabbage in preventing cancer in humans and experimental animals.

Bioflavonoids found in soybeans have weak estrogen-like activity. If a woman is deficient in estrogen (early menopause, for example), consuming soy products can replace the missing estrogen and relieve hot flashes. If a person is exposed to an excess of estrogen, the flavonoids in soy act as estrogen blockers and lower the effects of estrogen. The low frequency of breast cancer in East Asia, where soy is a major source of protein, has been attributed to the mild estrogen-blocking effect of soy flavonoids. Preliminary research indicates that soy flavonoids can block the estrogenic effects of dioxin.

Infection-Fighting Foods

A high intake of vegetables increases the consumption of a group of natural chemicals called saponins, which have immune-stimulating and antibiotic effects. Saponins are the latest in a long list of plant chemicals that are not considered nutrients, the way that vitamins are, because no deficiency state has been identified, but which promote health. In plants, saponins seem to function as natural

antibiotics, protecting the plant against microbial parasites. In humans, they may thwart cancer and ward off infection. Saponins are most highly concentrated in soybeans, chickpeas, bean sprouts, asparagus, tomatoes, potatoes and oats. They have a creamy texture and a sweet taste that separates them from other plant components. Some biotechnology companies are presently attempting to harvest saponins and use them as drugs.

Carrots, carob, blueberries and raspberries contain complex sugars (oligosaccharides), which interfere with the binding of pathogenic bacteria to the intestinal lining. These have been used in Europe for centuries for the treatment or prevention of diarrhea.

Before they were used as seasoning, culinary herbs and spices were probably used for food preservation. Many varieties have natural antimicrobial activity and can retard spoilage. They are also used to mask the flavor of spoiled food, so I suggest using them at home, where you know the food they flavor is fresh to begin with.

The world's most extensively studied spice is garlic. Its medicinal use predates recorded history. Garlic is mentioned in the earliest Vedic medical documents, written in India over five thousand years ago. During an epidemic of plague in Marseilles, in 1721, four condemned criminals were enlisted to bury the dead. None of them contracted plague. It seems that they sustained themselves by drinking a cocktail of crushed garlic in cheap wine, which came to be called *vinaigre des quatre voleurs* (vinegar of the four thieves).

In 1858, Louis Pasteur demonstrated garlic's antibiotic activity. Albert Schweitzer used the herb for the treatment of amoebic dysentery at his clinic in Africa. Antimicrobial activity of garlic has been repeatedly demonstrated against many species of bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses. In addition, garlic lowers cholesterol and blood pressure and may protect against cancer. The dose of garlic needed to obtain significant benefit is at least ten grams (about three small cloves) per day. Garlic also has a great immune-enhancing effect, stimulating activity of natural killer cells in healthy people and in people with AIDs. AIDS patients taking five to ten grams of aged garlic (equivalent to two to three small cloves) per day developed normal natural killer cell activity after twelve weeks, which was associated with clinical improvement.

Onion, garlic's closest edible relative, has also been widely used for medicinal purposes. Although it lacks the potency of garlic, it can be consumed in much larger quantity, so that its antimicrobial benefits may be equal to those of garlic if consumed regularly.

Turmeric, a major ingredient in curry powder, is a natural antibiotic that relieves intestinal gas by lowering the numbers of gas forming bacteria, has antifungal activity and has been traditionally used for relieving inflammation. The effective dose is about one gram per day.

Ginger, which contains over four hundred chemically active ingredients, has long been used for the treatment of digestive complaints. It protects the intestinal lining against ulceration and has a wide range of actions against intestinal parasites. Cinnamon, which I recommend for sweetening the taste of ginger tea, has anti-fungal activity.

Sage and rosemary contain the essential oil, eucalyptol, which kills *Candida albicans*, bacteria, and worms. Oregano contains over thirty biologically active ingredients of which twelve have antibiotic, anti-viral, anti-parasitic or anti-fungal effects. As mentioned earlier, thyme has anti-parasitic activity.

Meals seasoned with these pungent, aromatic herbs, consumed regularly, help protect against intestinal infection. However, heating at 200 degrees (Fahrenheit) for twenty minutes destroys the antibacterial activity of most of these spices. They should be added to food at the end of cooking, just before being eaten.

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