

8 FOODS WITH SUPERPOWERS

Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC

Happy National Nutrition Month® to all who celebrate! Given the importance of food in our daily lives, hopefully, that includes just about everyone. This year's theme is "Discover the Power of Nutrition," which emphasizes eating healthfully and taking small, sustainable steps towards better health. Food is truly powerful when you consider what we put on the end of our fork impacts not only our health and our "health span," but so many other things, including our mood, energy level, and sleep.

While all whole, real, nutrient-dense foods are powerful, there are some that are nutritional superheroes. Here are eight of my favorite superhero foods, each with its own superpower:

Cabbage

Cabbage has apparently become very trendy (it's been declared the "It" vegetable of the year) and with good reason. It's inexpensive, lasts forever in the fridge, and is loaded with antioxidants linked to cancer prevention. It's excellent raw in salads, but really shines when you slow-cook it, becoming much sweeter.

Sardines

What's not to love about canned sardines? They're inexpensive, convenient, an excellent source of protein, very high in omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D, and because they are small, less likely to accumulate heavy metals. While I may not have convinced all of you, if you're curious, give them a try. Start with skinless and boneless sardines. They're delicious on a whole grain cracker with some mustard or horseradish sauce.

Walnuts

Have you ever noticed walnuts look like little brains? It's like nature is telling us, "Eat these, they're good for your brain!" Why? They contain plant-based Omega-3s, polyphenols, magnesium, and fiber. They are a great snack to stabilize blood sugar levels, as well as support heart health. Toasting walnuts deepens their flavor- just be careful not to burn them!

Arugula

Arugula has a peppery bite that comes from the same family of compounds found in other cruciferous vegetables like cabbage and broccoli. It's a nutritional powerhouse, high in vitamin K, folate, and nitrates (which support blood flow and healthy arteries). Next time you order pizza, top it with a little fresh arugula to add some greens and a delicious fresh crunch to the melted cheese.

Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolate is rich in polyphenols that help support blood flow and cardiac health. A recent research study found that people with high levels of theobromine, a compound found in chocolate, aged more slowly. Another study found significantly lower levels of depression in people who routinely ate dark chocolate. Try to buy dark chocolate with the highest percentage of cacao that you still enjoy!

Canned Beans

Canned beans are not only convenient and a good source of protein, but they also contain resistant starch, a beneficial fiber-like carbohydrate that resists digestion and supports blood sugar control and gut health. For a quick snack or meal, try topping a whole-grain tortilla with black beans and cheese, and warm in the microwave or oven. Top with salsa and some chopped cabbage, and roll it up for an easy and healthy meal!





Frozen Raspberries

These are a staple fruit in my freezer. They're convenient and delicious straight from the bag, and also contain some pretty amazing superpowers. Raspberries are a low-glycemic fruit, which means they have minimal impact on blood sugar levels. They are also surprisingly high in fiber (about 4 grams per ½ cup) as well as an excellent source of antioxidants.

Try mixing frozen raspberries into steel-cut oats with a little bit of cocoa powder, nut butter, and a drizzle of honey for a high-fiber breakfast treat!

Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO)

Extra Virgin Olive Oil is an anti-inflammatory superhero. "Extra-virgin" refers to the first cold pressing of olives, which captures the most polyphenols, including a compound called oleocanthal. Oleocanthal is what creates the peppery throat sensation in quality olive oil, and research shows it acts similarly to ibuprofen in reducing inflammation. Some of these compounds may degrade slightly with heat, so one of the best ways to preserve olive oil's health benefits is to use it as a finishing oil - drizzle it over roasted vegetables, grilled fish, or soups just before serving. Of course, you can cook with EVOO as well. According to the USDA website, it can be used for most cooking methods, and the idea that EVOO shouldn't be heated is outdated. Store your olive oil in a cool, dark place in a tinted bottle to protect the polyphenols from light and heat degradation.

Of course, the list of superhero foods goes on because ALL real, whole foods have the power to nourish and sustain us.

What are the nutrition superheroes hiding in your kitchen?

WALNUT & DARK CHOCOLATE STUFFED DATES

Here is a recipe for Walnut & Dark Chocolate Stuffed Dates to satisfy your sweet and salty cravings in a healthy way!

INGREDIENTS:

- 10 pitted Medjool dates, sliced lengthwise
- ½ cup raw walnut halves
- ½ cup dark chocolate chips
- Flaky sea salt for sprinkling (optional)

PREPARATION

1. Melt chocolate in microwave on defrost setting.
2. Place 1 or 2 walnuts halves inside each date, pinching the date closed after stuffing.
3. Dip bottom half of each date into the melted chocolate.
4. Sprinkle with sea salt, place on parchment paper to harden. Refrigerate in an airtight container.



Heidi Roth, RD, LDN is a Registered/Licensed Dietitian, Health Coach and nutrition expert with a passion for health and wellness. She graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a BS in Nutrition and Dietetics.

