

# Journey to Better Health Report

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## Superfoods for Your Health

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### Figs:

Nearly one in three American adults has hypertension, or high blood pressure, which can lead to stroke, heart and kidney disease. Fortunately, dietary changes may help control and even lower blood pressure. If Americans were able to increase their potassium intake, the number of adults with known hypertension would decrease while life expectancy would rise, according to a recent study published in the "Journal of Clinical Hypertension." When you think of potassium, you probably think of bananas.

While bananas are an excellent source of potassium -- one medium banana has 422 mg -- you could try mixing it up with figs. Just six dried figs have 774 mg potassium. Keep in mind, however, that when you're comparing portions of equal weights, bananas still come out on top. One hundred grams of figs contains 232 mg of potassium, compared with 358 mg of potassium in 100 grams of a banana.

### Lychee:

While you may think wine (or the produce in wine: grapes) have the highest level of heart-healthy polyphenols, a French study published in September 2006 issue of the "Journal of Nutrition" found that lychee has the second-highest level of polyphenols of all fruits tested, coming in above red and white grapes. Though, if you are going to go for grapes, the study found that red grapes had nearly twice the polyphenol concentration of their white counterparts. Plus, grapes are also a main source of the anti-aging compound resveratrol which lychees don't contain.

### Asian Pears:

In terms of fiber, an Asian pear outdoes regular pears and apples -- what you'd typically think of as high-fiber foods -- by about two times the grams. Just one of these pears has about 10 grams of the daily recommended 25 grams. Fiber is an essential part of any diet -- it can help lower your risk of constipation, hemorrhoids, hernias, coronary artery disease and colon cancer, as well as help keep you filled on fewer calories and lower your cholesterol.

### Blueberries:

These amazing berries are on anyone's list of super foods. Recent research shows that they're brain food -- feeding blueberries to rats actually slows their age-related mental decline. Blueberries contain pterostilbene, a plant compound recently shown to have cholesterol-lowering properties. Their ORAC value (antioxidant rating) is the highest of any fruit. And blueberries are rich in fiber. Tip: Try them frozen. They taste like sherbet!

### Kale:

Kale is a member of the brassica family -- vegetable royalty that boasts cabbage and broccoli among its relatives. It's rich in potent cancer-fighting substances called indoles, and loaded with bone-building vitamin K. Kale has the highest antioxidant rating of any vegetable and is ridiculously low in calories. Try it tossed with olive oil, a few dried cranberries and some pine nuts.

### Green Tea:

A superstar beverage if there ever was one, green tea helps with weight loss and helps fight against cancer. It contains EGCG, a catechin (plant compound) which stimulates metabolism and has anti-cancer properties to boot. Green tea also contains theanine, a natural relaxant which helps explain why the caffeine in green tea doesn't make you nearly as jittery as coffee.

### Sardines:

These little fish are the best kept secret in the world when it comes to health foods and the secret weapon of travelers looking for a cheap, portable, easily available source of protein. Sardines are rich in omega-3 fats, and one of the least contaminated of any seafood since they rank so low on the food chain. Eat them out of the can or throw them on some salad.



### Guava:

Among the super foods of the world, guava is a sleeper. With a taste that's been described as "part strawberry and part pear," one low-calorie cup of this vitamin-rich fruit contains a whopping eight grams of fiber. And in one widely used test of antioxidant power, guava scored second only to blueberries, right behind kale. Guava also contains cancer-fighting lycopene. In addition to serving up daily fiber benefits, this fruit contains about five times the amount of vitamin C as one serving of oranges. Vitamin C, a nutrient that plays an important role in immunity boosting and wound healing, may also help keep you wrinkle-free, according to an October 2007 study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. The study found that lower dietary intakes of vitamin C were significantly associated with wrinkles and dry skin, regardless of participant age, sun exposure, race, income, BMI, supplement use and physical activity. One cup of guava also gives you over 63 percent more potassium than a banana -- 688 mg.

### Purple Tomatoes:

Scientists have known that anthocyanins, pigments that naturally occur at high levels in blackberries and cranberries, are associated with protecting against some aging-related diseases and cancers. So a team of British researchers set out to mimic the level of anthocyanins in more commonly eaten produce, like tomatoes. They engineered these tomatoes to include two genes from snapdragons, which in turn yielded higher anthocyanins, a purple pigment, and longer lifespans in cancer-treated mice. The findings were published in the October 2008 issue of Nature Biotechnology.

### Flaxseeds:

Flaxseed oil is one of the only plant sources of omega-3 fats, but the flaxseeds themselves provide the added benefit of fiber along with omega-3. Flaxseeds can be thrown on salads, tossed into smoothies, or sprinkled on vegetables. They also contain lignans, a group of plant nutrients that have been studied by the National Cancer Institute for their cancer preventive properties.



### Papaya:

According to Stanford University's Cancer Center, preliminary evidence suggests that some cancer-fighting food components too look out for include phytochemicals and antioxidants -- both of which can be found in papaya. Phytochemicals, nutrients such as the lycopene and flavanoids in papayas, protect against bacteria and viruses. Antioxidants, such as vitamin C found in papayas, protect against damaging effects of free radicals and tumor growth.

### Quinoa:

Pronounced KEEN-wah, this hearty grain is being touted as the newest superfood and it's easy to see why. Rich in protein, with only a few carbohydrates and a bit of healthy fats, quinoa is nutritionally superior to rice, corn, and wheat. It's easy to prepare and can be served in a variety of ways from a dessert dish to breakfast cereal.

### Apples:

The juicy red or green apple's reputation for keeping you out of the doctor's office is well deserved. Loaded with pectin (an important fiber), apples are one of the best sources of boron, a little-known nutrient that helps support strong and healthy bones. An apple with a glass of water is a great natural appetite suppressant. Highest antioxidant value: Red Delicious.

### Coconut Oil:

This superb oil has been long neglected as a healthy oil because it contains saturated fat. But not to worry: The saturated fat in coconut is a very healthy kind called MCT (medium chain triglycerides) which is easily burned by the body for energy. Coconut oil also contains lauric acid, a natural anti-viral and anti-microbial. And today's excellent virgin coconut oil -- unlike the inferior products of a few decades ago -- doesn't contain trans fats.

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