

Foods That Are Always a Great Choice

THE ISSUE: Americans hear a lot about what foods they should avoid. But what about foods that you should eat—and eat more of? Rather than just focusing on limiting your and your family’s intake of food that isn’t good for you, you can also focus on increasing the amount of good food available to you and your family. Increasing the intake of good foods can help reduce the intake of not-so-good ones. The foods listed below are always great choices, backed by science, to help you live better and longer.

THE CONCERNS:

In 2019, just **12 out of every 100 U.S. adults** ate enough fruit, and only 10 out of 100 met their vegetable goals. That’s 9 out of 10 people missing key nutrients. [A study in Circulation](#) found that eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day can help prevent early death for approximately one in every eight people. It also lowers the chances of heart attacks, cancer, and lung disease by up to a third.

- The [World Health Organization](#) estimates that not eating enough fruits and vegetables contributes to 3.9 million deaths globally each year.
- While Americans consume too little healthy food, they consume too much food of little nutritional value.
- [A Lancet study](#) found that ultra-processed foods—like sugary drinks and chips—now contribute to about one in ten deaths worldwide. These foods drive inflammation, weight gain, and chronic illness.

SOLUTIONS: The good news? You can take control by choosing foods that are always a win for your health. These nutrient-dense options are like superheroes for your body, fighting disease and boosting vitality. Here's the lineup, with why they're great and how to easily make them part of your life:

Non-Starchy Vegetables

- *Examples:* Broccoli, kale, spinach, bell peppers, zucchini.
- *Benefits:* These veggies are low-calorie, high-fiber powerhouses packed with vitamins and minerals.
 - ❑ A **major study** found that people who ate around five cups of fruits and vegetables a day—especially leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables like broccoli—had up to a 33% lower risk of stroke and were about 25% less likely to develop heart disease compared to those who ate very little.
- *How to Incorporate:* Fill half your plate with these at every meal. Roast them with olive oil, toss them in salads, or blend them into smoothies.

Colorful Fruits

- *Examples:* Blueberries, strawberries, apples, oranges.
- *Benefits:* Fruits are loaded with antioxidants, vitamins, and fiber.
 - ❑ One **study** found that people who regularly ate blueberries had brain function equal to someone 2.5 years younger.
 - ❑ Vitamin C from oranges can **shorten the length of a cold by about a day**.
 - ❑ And yes, fruit contains natural sugar—but nearly all colorful fruits, like berries, citrus, and apples, are rich in soluble fiber, which slows sugar absorption and helps keep blood sugar levels steady. You're not going to gain weight from eating an apple, and unless you've been advised to strictly limit sugar for a specific medical reason, fruit is a healthy, nutrient-rich choice.
 - ❑ Colorful fruits are one of the easiest and most delicious ways to boost your immune system and fight inflammation.
- *How to Incorporate:* Snack on fresh or frozen fruit, add to yogurt, or blend into smoothies.

Healthy Fats

- *Examples:* Extra virgin olive oil, walnuts, almonds, chia seeds, flaxseeds.
- *Benefits:* These fats fight inflammation and support heart health.
 - According to a [study](#), just one tablespoon a day of extra virgin olive oil has been linked to a 10% lower risk of heart disease.
 - Another [study](#) found that a handful of walnuts a day may boost memory and focus in older adults.
- *How to Incorporate:* Drizzle olive oil on salads or use it for cooking. Grab a small handful of nuts or sprinkle seeds on oatmeal.

Quality Proteins

- *Examples:* salmon (ideally wild-caught), sardines, lean beef (ideally grass-fed), eggs, beans, lentils, tofu.
- *Benefits:* Proteins help build strong muscles and keep your hormones balanced.
 - A [study in JAMA](#) found that the healthy fats in salmon can help keep your heart healthy by lowering the kind of fat in your blood that raises heart disease risk.
- *How to Incorporate:* Include a protein source at every meal. Try fish twice a week or swap meat for beans a few times weekly.

Whole Grains

- *Examples:* Quinoa, brown rice, oats, barley.
- *Benefits:* Whole grains deliver fiber and nutrients that lower heart disease and diabetes risk.
 - A [Harvard study](#) found that eating about three servings a day—think a bowl of oatmeal for breakfast or whole-grain bread for your sandwich at lunch—can lower your risk of heart disease by over 20% and type 2 diabetes by about the same.
- *How to Incorporate:* Swap white rice for brown rice or choose whole-grain bread over white.

Fermented Foods

- *Examples:* Yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso.
- *Benefits:* Rich in probiotics that boost gut health and immunity, one [study](#) found that eating fermented foods daily has been shown to

increase the number of good bacteria in your gut, which can reduce inflammation and improve digestion.

- *How to Incorporate:* Add a small serving daily, such as yogurt as a snack or blended into a smoothie or sauerkraut on the side of your main meal.

CONCLUSION: These foods aren't just good for you—they're game-changers. By making them a regular part of your diet, you're not only fueling your body but also cutting your risk of serious diseases. The science is clear: Eating five servings of fruits and vegetables daily could save millions of lives globally. Start small: Add a handful of spinach to your lunch, swap chips for nuts, or choose fresh fruit instead of ice cream for dessert. Since everyone's body is different, always check with your healthcare provider to tailor these dietary adjustments to your personal needs. Your future self will thank you for making these foods your go-to.

SOURCES:

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