



The ABCs of Superfoods

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Skincare has become an alphabet soup guide of BB and CC Creams. Why not educate yourself about the A-Z guide of super-foods for your body and treat your inside as well as the outside?

Consumers are inundated today with BB, CC, and now DD creams for their face. Skincare has become a veritable alphabet to decode. Due to advertising, the average woman is fairly familiar with what each of these does. While these creams address the outside, there is an A-Z list of essential superfoods for the inside that people may not be as familiar with. Knowing these is vital for maintaining and sustaining good health.

Franci Cohen is a New York personal trainer, certified nutritionist, exercise physiologist and creator of SPIDERBANDS®. She explains that, “A superfood is, “a nutrient-rich food considered to be especially beneficial for health and well-being.” She touts broccoli, sprouts and salmon as two of the most perfect superfoods. Here are some A-Z examples all women and men should incorporate into their daily meal plan.

Berries: Pack an incredible amount of nutritional goodness into a small package. They’re loaded with antioxidants, phytonutrients, low in calories, and high in water and fiber to help control blood sugar and keep you full longer. And their flavors satisfy sweets cravings for a fraction of the calories in baked goods. Blueberries lead the pack because they are among the best source of antioxidants and are widely available. Cranberries are also widely available fresh, frozen, or dried. All can add flavor and nutrition to numerous dishes, from salads and cereals to baked goods and yogurt.

Broccoli: Is one of America’s favorite vegetables because it tastes good and is available all year long. It’s a rich source of vitamin A, vitamin C, and bone-building vitamin K, and has plenty of fiber to fill you up and help control your weight. “Some people think beta-carotene (vitamin A) is only found in orange and yellow vegetables, but broccoli is an excellent source,” says Franci Cohen. You can eat broccoli raw, lightly steamed, stir-fried, roasted, or grilled. Eat it as a side dish, or toss into grains, egg dishes, soups, and salads.

Coconut Oil: A heart-healthy antioxidant that can keep your body running smoother in a few different ways, coconut oil can help bolster your body against viruses and bacteria that can cause illness. It can also boost thyroid function and blood-sugar control as well as aid with digestion, reduce cholesterol and keep weight balanced.

How to use it: The oil works in baked goods and with vegetables and pairs well with bitter greens like kale, or use it as part of an onion or garlic sauté or add it to oatmeal – the possibilities are endless! While no formal study has figured out the exact amount for optimal benefit, one to two tablespoons a day can be beneficial.

Eggs: Make the list because they are nutritious, versatile, economical, and a great way to fill up on quality protein. “Studies show if you eat eggs at breakfast, you may eat fewer calories during the day and lose weight without significantly affecting cholesterol levels,” says Cohen. Eggs also contain 12 vitamins and

minerals, including choline, which is good for brain development and memory. Enjoy them at any meal or hard-cooked as a portable snack.

Kiwis: Are among the most nutritionally dense fruits, full of antioxidants, says Franci. “One large kiwi supplies your daily requirement for vitamin C. It is also a good source of potassium, fiber, and a decent source of vitamin A and vitamin E, which is one of the missing nutrients, and kiwi is one of the only fruits that provides it.” The sweet taste and colorful appearance of kiwis makes it easy to slice in half, scoop out with a spoon and enjoy alone, or slice it into desserts, salads, or side dishes. Kiwifruit can also have a mild laxative effect due to their high fiber content.

Mustard Greens: If you guessed its seeds are used to make mustard, you were right! One of the diet staples of the Greek island Icaria, where 1 in 3 people live to the age of 90, these spicy greens are rich in vitamin K (which most Americans are deficient in) and are good for your blood and bone strength. They’re also rich in natural substances called sulforaphanes that, when eaten, help the body get rid of bile acid in our gut. Bile acids are used by the body to make cholesterol, so the less bile acid results in less cholesterol.

Nuts: Have gotten a bad rap because of their high fat content. But their protein, heart-healthy fats, high fiber, and antioxidant content earn them a place on the top 10 list. The key to enjoying nuts, experts say, is portion control. “All nuts are healthful in small doses, and studies show they can help lower cholesterol levels and promote weight loss,” says Franci. “I like pistachio nuts because they also contain plant sterols and it takes longer to crack the shell and eat them, making it easier to control the portion. Whether you prefer pistachios, almonds, peanuts, walnuts, or pecans, an ounce a day of nuts help fill you up. Nuts add texture and flavor to salads, side dishes, baked goods, cereals, and entrees. They taste great alone, too. Franci recommends putting together your own “100-calorie packs” of nuts for easy and portable snacks.

Oats: Why they’re super: Full of fiber, oats are a rich source of magnesium, potassium, and phytonutrients. They contain a special type of fiber that helps to lower cholesterol and prevent heart disease. Magnesium works to regulate blood-sugar levels, and research suggests that eating whole-grain oats may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Quinoa: Is now readily available in many supermarkets and is one of the best whole grains you can eat, according to Cohen. “It is an ancient grain, easy to make, interesting, high in protein (8 grams in 1 cup cooked), fiber (5 grams per cup) and a naturally good source of iron,” she says. Quinoa (pronounced keen-wa) also has plenty of zinc, vitamin E, and selenium to help control your weight and lower your risk for heart disease and diabetes, she says. Quinoa is as easy to prepare as rice and can be eaten alone or mixed with vegetables, nuts, or lean protein for a whole-grain medley. Try to make at least half your daily grain servings whole grains. In addition to quinoa, try barley, oats, buckwheat, whole wheat, wild rice, and millet.

Red Wine: Red wine, made with the dark skin and seeds of grapes, is rich in polyphenols, a type of antioxidant that includes resveratrol, and resveratrol, a natural plant compound, has antioxidant and inflammatory properties. Research shows that it can prevent blood clots and inhibit the growth of cancer cells; other studies show it may have a positive impact on longevity. Resveratrol has also been shown to have very powerful cancer-fighting properties and to inhibit lymph, liver, prostate, stomach and breast cancers.

Salmon: Is a super food because of its omega-3 fatty acid content. Studies show that omega-3 fatty acids help protect heart health. That’s why the American Heart Association recommends eating fatty fish like salmon twice weekly. Salmon is low in calories (200 for 3 ounces) has lots of protein, is a good source of iron, and is very low in saturated fat. You can simply grill or bake it, top it with salsas or other low-fat sauces, or serve it on top of salad greens. If you don’t like salmon, Franci recommends eating other kinds of fish, like canned tuna. And what about the mercury content? (Mercury is known to accumulate in fish.) “The

benefits of eating salmon or other fatty fish twice weekly far outweigh any risks, but if you are concerned, check with your doctor,” says Cohen.

Sweet potatoes: Are a delicious member of the dark orange vegetable family, which lead the pack in vitamin A content. Substitute a baked sweet potato (also loaded with vitamin C, calcium, and potassium) for a baked white potato. And before you add butter or sugar, taste the sweetness that develops when a sweet potato is cooked — and think of all the calories you can save over that loaded baked potato. “If we eat more foods like sweet potatoes that are rich sources of potassium, and fewer high-sodium foods, we can blunt the effect of sodium on blood pressure and reduce bone loss,” says Franci. Other dark orange vegetable standouts include pumpkin, carrots, butternut squash, and orange bell peppers.

Tomatoes: Why they’re super: They contain lycopene, an antioxidant rarely found in other foods. Studies suggest that it could protect the skin against harmful UV rays, prevent certain cancers, and lower cholesterol. Plus, tomatoes contain high amounts of potassium, fiber, and vitamin C.

Yogurt: Is higher in calcium than some other dairy products and contains a great package of other nutrients, including protein and potassium. It can also be enhanced with other good-for-you substances. “Yogurt is a vehicle food that can be enriched with probiotics for a healthy balance of bacteria in your gut, and beneficial, heart-healthy plant stanols,” says Franci. “And lactose sensitive people may tolerate yogurt better than milk.” Look for plain yogurt fortified with vitamin D, and add your own fruit to control sweetness and calories. Versatile yogurt can also be used in entree and bakery recipes, in dips for veggies, etc. Don’t like yogurt? Skim milk is another super dairy food that has only 83 calories per cup and is easy to slip into coffee to help you get one of the recommended three servings of dairy each day.

“Dairy foods contain practically every nutrient you need for total nutrition — and in just the right balance,” says Franci. “No other food group in the diet is as complete or as economical.”

Franci Cohen is a personal trainer, certified nutritionist, exercise physiologist and creator of **SPIDERBANDS®**, a total-body cardio resistance workout that leverages gravity and your bodyweight with other intense exercise modules such as rebounding, kickboxing and indoor cycling. With over 18 years of experience, Franci has been a mainstay in the fitness and nutrition industries. Franci believes in a tough love approach to fitness and health. “We all have our fitness wake-up call at some point in our lives and it can be a powerful catalyst for change,” says Franci. “Unfortunately, many people overcompensate and try to change everything at once, which is a disaster. Making lasting change involves going through stages that aren’t necessarily linear. People fluctuate and transition between the stages. Knowing how to move through them can get you where you want to be.”

Franci devotes much of her time to Fuel Fitness, a specialty fitness center in Brooklyn, NY and continues to teach group fitness classes, train clients and broaden her perspective in all areas of fitness, nutrition and wellness. She designs unique fitness modules and group exercise programs for her clients utilizing the most effective and popular products, tools and exercise equipment available. “Exercise is one of the most important things you can do for your health, but sometimes it’s hard to just get motivated. My goal is to keep it fun and interesting by creating out-of-the-box programs that wow my clients with both the innovative nature of the classes, as well as with the rapid results they see in their bodies! My classes are the ultimate playground where fitness meets fun, and nothing is off limits!”