

# Newsletter

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## Building the Perfect Feast

### 15 tricks that turn ordinary foods into nutritional superpowers

Philip Rhodes (Men's Health March 2004)

There's probably a reason you eat the foods you do. Because your mom made them for you. Or because they come in the EZ-open pouch. But if you keep eating the way you always have, you'll never improve on the body you've got. And the prognosis-on the mom diet, at least-isn't good. Look at your dad. That's why providing you with 15 sneaky ways to improve your diet. Same foods, better results. And nobody needs to be the wiser. Just think of these food strategies as the cork in your bat, the glue on your glove, your own personal, syringe-wielding East German Olympic swim-team coach. Only difference is, each one is simple, nutritionally sound and perfectly legal in all 50 states.

**1. Whey your options** Add a cup of ricotta cheese to your fruit smoothie. Ricotta is a soft, mild cheese that's made almost entirely of whey, the liquid that separates from curd during the cheese-making process. Whey contains cysteine, an amino acid that helps produce a cancer-fighting antioxidant called glutathione. When Ohio State University researchers treated prostate cells with whey protein, glutathione levels jumped by 64 percent.

**2. See Red** Got leftover tuna salad? Stuff it into a red bell pepper instead of sandwiching it between two slabs of Wonder bread. Red peppers and other red-fleshed fruits such as tomatoes, watermelons and ruby-red grapefruit are high in lycopene, a phytochemical that can reduce the risk of prostate cancer by 20 percent. Bake the pepper and you'll make it even more potent; heat makes lycopene easier for your body to absorb.

**3. Hit the sauce** Think of salsa as a vegetable and eat it as often as you can. "Just take a fish fillet, pour salsa over it and throw it in the oven-you've got an instant healthy meal," says Cynthia Sass, M.P.H., and R.D. In addition to containing lycopene from the tomatoes, salsa has no fat, only 4 calories per tablespoon and as little as 70 milligrams (mg) of sodium.

**4. Switch Syrups** Move over, Aunt Jemima: better syrup has come to take your place at the breakfast table. "Sorghum syrup is produced in much the same way that molasses is made from sugar-cane and it's one of the best, most concentrated sources of dietary antioxidants- period," says Cheryl Forberg R.D., author of *Stop the Clock! Cooking*. Like grits, sorghum syrup is more widely available in the South. But you can find it at specialty-food stores all over the country.

**5. Spread the Wealth** You could buy your own produce stand in order to keep up with the National Cancer Institute's recommended nine daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Or you could just buy your fruit in a jar. One tablespoon of unsweetened fruit spread (not sugary jelly or jam) on your morning bagel counts as one of the day's servings, says David Grotto, R.D., director of nutrition education at the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Care in Evanston, Illinois. Look for brands with a high vitamin content, like Crofters Organic.

**6. Supplement with Herbs** More oregano makes for a more powerful pizza. A tablespoon of fresh oregano (not the dried, bottled kind-natch) has a higher antioxidant yield than an entire apple, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers, who measured the antioxidant levels of 39 common

herbs. Bonus: Calorie counts for most herbs and spices are nonexistent. The same can't be said for other pizza toppings, like, say, sausage.

**7. Be Crafty With Broccoli** Power up your mac and cheese by stirring in a cup of chopped steamed broccoli. When you eat cruciferous vegetables-such as broccoli, cauliflower, kale and Brussels sprouts-your body produces a chemical compound called 3,3'-diindolylmethane that inhibits prostate cancer cell growth by up to 70 percent, according to Leonard Bjeldanes, Ph. D., a professor of nutritional sciences and toxicology at the University of California at Berkeley. "I eat a large serving of them three to five times a week," he says. You should, too.

**8. Get A Fruit Fix** That muck on the bottom of most yogurts has more fructose-as in high-fructose corn syrup- than it has fruit. In addition to unnecessarily inflating the calorie count, HFCS can significantly increase blood levels of triglycerides, raising your risk of heart disease. Opt for plain yogurt instead and toss in some raisins or dried pineapple chunks. Dehydrated fruit offers all the health benefits of regular fruit, just concentrated.

**9. Go To Seed** Risk an encounter with patchouli-scented Birkenstock wearers and buy a bag of ground flaxseed at the health-food store. Add 3 or 4 tablespoons of it to cereal or oatmeal. Ground flaxseed contains omega-3 fatty acids, fiber and compounds called lignans-the nutrients that can reduce your risk of colon and prostate cancers, heart disease and age-related vision loss. "You can consume flaxseed as an oil," Grotto says, "but the oil contains more calories and fewer lignans, even in products that boast high lignans content."

**10. Feel Like A Nut-Sometimes** Nuts may have shed their unhealthy reputation, but that's still no reason to... well, go nuts, cautions Sass. To keep their high calorie content in check, she suggests adding a golf ball-size serving of slivered almonds to cereal and steamed vegetables. Almonds are a rich source of vitamin E, which may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease by up to 70 percent, according to a National Institute on aging study.

**11. Turn Over A New Leaf** Banish iceberg lettuce from your sandwiches and salads; it has about as much nutritional value as it has taste. "Spinach gives you more bang for the buck," says Forberg. A cup of spinach is an excellent source of folate (58 micrograms), which may help reduce your risk of heart attack.

**12. Choc One Up** It may sound weird, but try dropping a couple of chunks of chocolate into your pot of chili, your chili will taste better (trust us) and you'll feel better, knowing that the flavonoids and polyphenols in chocolate can lower your risk of heart disease by 20 percent and keep LDL (bad) cholesterol from oxidizing into an artery-damaging form. Dark or semisweet chocolate has more of the beneficial compounds than other types do.

**13. Sow Your Oats** In recipes that call for crumbles crackers (such as burgers or meat loaf), bait and switch with an equal amount of rolled oats. "Oats contain soluble fiber and that's been shown to reduce cholesterol," says Grotto. "Oats also contain glucans, which have been shown to enhance natural killer cells-a type of white blood cell that bolster immune function."

**14. Add Meal To Your Meal** Add cornmeal to watery soup to transform it into a hearty, healthier stew, says Forberg. Cornmeal contains an antioxidant called zeaxanthin, which helps preserve vision by increasing the concentration of macular pigment in your eyes. Cornmeal also contains starch that will thicken the soup broth, which is why you should whisk or stir a small handful of it in very slowly (otherwise), the soup may get lumpy).

**15. Mash In Milk** Whole milk helps make mashed potatoes fluffy. Unfortunately, it does the same for you. Whether you're making the real thing or rehydrating potato flakes, use evaporated skim milk instead. "It's thicker, so you get the creaminess but not the fat," says Sass. You also get three times the calcium per cup (742 mg). Cans of it hide in that most alien of grocery-store aisles: the baking section.

### **Not-So-Great Pretenders**

#### **(5 "healthy" foods that aren't)**

**1. Ground Turkey.** More proof that it's better to be a breast man. If you use ground turkey that includes dark meat, your turkey patty will contain more fat, calories and cholesterol than a burger made with 95 percent lean beef. Be sure you buy ground turkey made from breast meat only.

**2. Veggie Chips Or Sticks.** What's in a name? In this case, not what you'd think. Many vegetable chips are just nutrient-free nothings constructed out of potato flour with a bit of vegetable puree thrown in for color. Baked potato chips are a better bet. They have fewer calories and less fat.

**3. Sunny Delight.** It's got vitamin C going for it, but otherwise this chemical cocktail is nutritionally void. Check the ingredient label: water, high-fructose corn syrup, yellow food coloring and only 2 percent or less of orange, tangerine, apple, lime or grapefruit juice. Stick with real orange juice.

**4. Granola.** It sounds so good for you. After all, the word itself has even become synonymous with a healthy lifestyle. But high fiber can't cover for saturated-fat levels higher than you'd find in a hamburger. Why have all that fat without any of the greasy goodness? Be smart, buy low-fat granola instead.

**5. Wheat Bread.** Often, breads labeled simply "wheat" are mostly made of fiber-stripped white flour that's been doctored with caramel coloring. "Whole" is the word you want to see, as in "whole-grain" or "whole-wheat"-these have the most vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants.