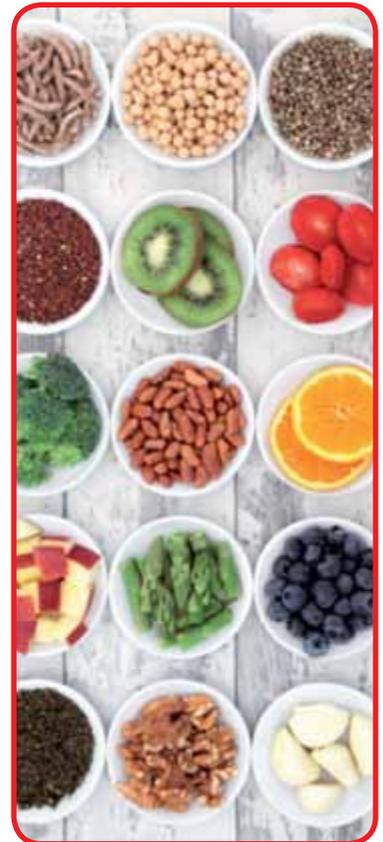


CONSUMER'S PERSPECTIVE

Top nutritionists name "must have" food

It has become in vogue for health-conscious consumers to have a "must have" food that they choose to include in their daily diet mainly because of its nutritional benefits. In order to pinpoint the popular ones, I took a consensus and asked a group of top registered dietitian-nutritionists which "must have" food or beverage is number one on their daily menu and why. Here are the results in a nutshell (in no particular order):

1. **Walnuts** in hot cereals and on top of salads for a boost of omega-3s, especially popular with plant-based dietitians.
2. **Plain low-fat Greek-style yogurt**, either as a stand-alone snack or part of breakfast mixed with a variety of fruit, nuts, seeds and/or grains averages 17 grams of protein per 6-ounce serving. It's also a low-fat substitute for mayo and is used to replace fats in baking.
3. **Quinoa**, a crop native to the Andes Mountains in South America, replaces hot cereal for a hearty, protein-packed breakfast. Quinoa can be prepared like oatmeal and topped with fresh fruit and nuts or seeds. The seed (yes, it's technically a seed—not a grain) contains eight grams of protein per cup. It is a complete protein, meaning it provides the nine essential amino acids your body needs.
4. **Garlic** as a healthy way to add flavor without salt to a wide variety of dishes, especially vegetables. Garlic produces a chemical called allicin, which may be beneficial for the heart and blood systems.
5. **Avocado** spread on toast because of its buttery texture and healthy fat. It's a wonderful alternative to butter on bread. Add a squeeze of fresh lemon, hot sauce or sprinkle with toasted seeds.
6. An **apple** a day for a zero-waste fast-food snack that keeps you away from junk food. Its fiber keeps you feeling full and the phytochemicals are an added health benefit.
7. Whole grains like steel-cut oats and ancient types like farro, barley and spelt for fiber and complex carbohydrates needed for an active and fit lifestyle. Oatmeal has a type of fiber known as beta-glucan, which helps to lower cholesterol and control blood sugar.
8. **Peanut butter** is economical, delicious and has a blend of protein, fat and fiber that fills you up and keeps you feeling satisfied. Everyone loves peanut butter smeared on banana for a snack or PBJ (peanut butter and jelly) smeared on whole-wheat toast for fueling up after an intense run. Opt for natural and organic brands without additives or grind your own.
9. **Chia seeds** add flavor and texture when mixed into oatmeal, smoothies, creamy nut butters, or yogurt for breakfast. A big trend is to mix the seeds with your favorite milk and leave overnight in the fridge for a creamy breakfast pudding. Seeds in general provide protein, calcium, antioxidants and omega-3 fats.
10. **Local and unprocessed sweeteners** like honey and maple syrup add depth and flavor when used to sweeten baked goods, beverages, dressings and sauces. Both are delicious drizzled on almost anything - even toast. Honey has antioxidants, enzymes and antimicrobial properties that may soothe a sore throat and even help with allergies if bought locally.
11. **Banana** is one of the most popular portable snacks and adds the perfect amount of sweetness to any breakfast smoothie. Bananas are packed with antioxidants, potassium, pectin (a type of fiber), magnesium, vitamins C and B6, and are naturally low in fat and sodium.
12. **Fermented foods** like traditionally made sauerkraut, pickles, kimchi, kombucha, sourdough bread, yogurt and kefir are chock-full of probiotics to help maintain a healthy level of beneficial gut bacteria, which may strengthen the body's immune system.
13. **Whole eggs** are satisfying, versatile and easy to whip up, plus packed with the highest biological protein, choline, lutein— with research supporting that one egg a day may not raise cholesterol so long as you follow a healthy diet. According to Beyond The Mediterranean Diet: European Secrets Of The Super-Healthy, the French like to eat eggs at lunch - such as an omelet or in a Nicoise salad - yet they have low rates of heart disease.
14. **Greens** such as spinach, lettuce or kale in smoothies, blended with frozen fruit and yogurt or milk. Smoothies are a great way to get in an extra serving of veggies everyday. Greens are considered the number one healthy food because they are so low in calories and packed with a variety of vitamins and minerals.



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15. **Green tea** is a young tea with the antioxidant catechin that may prevent cell damage. It's both relaxing and refreshing -- with less caffeine than black tea.
16. **Real Milk** (also known as cow's milk) is one of the best and most economical sources of protein at one gram of protein per ounce. It's rich in calcium, magnesium and often fortified with vitamin D, providing the essential nutrients for healthy bones and teeth. Opt for organic, lowfat (1 percent fat) for a balance of protein, fat and carbohydrates. Drinking one cup of milk is an ideal way to treat low-blood sugar.
17. **Sprouted whole-grain bread** is heartier and higher in protein, fiber and nutrients than regular bread, especially when there is no milled flour. Choose brands without sugar and preservatives that are lower in sodium and made with a variety of organic whole grains.
18. **Egg white** - from a large egg - has zero fat and zero cholesterol, yet adds an extra 3.6 grams of protein and only 17 calories, which makes a great source of lean protein for athletes. Two egg whites substitute for a whole egg in baking and cooking.
19. A scoop of **low-fat cottage cheese** with fruit at breakfast or on top of a salad at lunch is considered a typical "American" diet food. That's because it's packed with protein, low in fat and is a good source of calcium. Cultured, low-sodium and organic (bio) varieties are best.
20. **Citrus fruits** like oranges provide vitamin C, fiber and antioxidants especially during the winter months when other fruits are not locally available. Do like the Italians and juice two fresh oranges every morning -- it's the best way to start the day.
21. **Cinnamon's** comforting aromatic flavor works well in both sweet and savory dishes - and helps to cut back on sugar and salt. The spice adds depth to meat sauces, chicken dishes and may reduce blood sugar. Try it sprinkled on your latte.
22. **Dark chocolate** that's 80 percent or more cocoa (and also pure cocoa powder) are brimming with flavonoids, a class of antioxidants. However stick to a small square because all chocolate is made with cocoa butter, which is high in saturated fat, calories and sugar!
23. As for me, since I'm not a coffee drinker (except when I'm in Italy), it's all about waking up to a frothy Chai Latte. **Chai** originated from India and is a blend of black tea with medicinal spices and herbs like cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, clove, fennel seed and black peppercorn. It's available as loose tea, tea bags, liquid concentrate and powder. Chai tastes best combined with steamed milk and bit of natural sweetener. Besides loving the spicy and smooth taste, chai has one-third the caffeine that is in coffee and it's full of antioxidants. Other "must have" foods on my personal list include: hummus (traditionally made with chick peas), carrots, sweet potatoes, berries, part-skim ricotta cheese and other fresh cheeses, cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil, tomatoes and tofu.

While this seems like an extensive list of "must have" foods, it's most important to eat a variety of minimally processed foods that are organically grown and/or produced locally. Local and organic (bio) foods are better for you and the environment.

2016 is the International Year Of Pulses, so I'll be adding this category to my "must have" list. **Pulses** are a subcategory of legumes, which refer only to the dried seed like dried peas, beans, lentils and chick peas. Soybeans and green peas are not part of this group.

Pulses are packed with nutrients and are an ideal source of protein particularly in regions where meat and dairy are not physically or economically accessible. Pulses are low in fat and rich in soluble fiber, which can lower cholesterol and help control blood sugar. Because of these qualities they are recommended by health organizations for the management of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart conditions. Pulses have also been shown to help combat obesity.

Pulses reduce dependence on synthetic fertilizers used to introduce nitrogen artificially into the soil. Greenhouse gases are released during the manufacturing and application of these fertilizers, and their overuse can be detrimental to the environment.

Note: None of the foods listed above in any way are tied to industry sponsorship.

For a complete guide to healthy eating including 50 delicious and simple recipes for every meal of the day, pick up a copy of the award-winning book - *Beyond The Mediterranean Diet: European Secrets Of The Super-Healthy*, by **Layne Lieberman, MS, RD, CDN**.

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