



simply THE best

the most
nutritious foods
revealed

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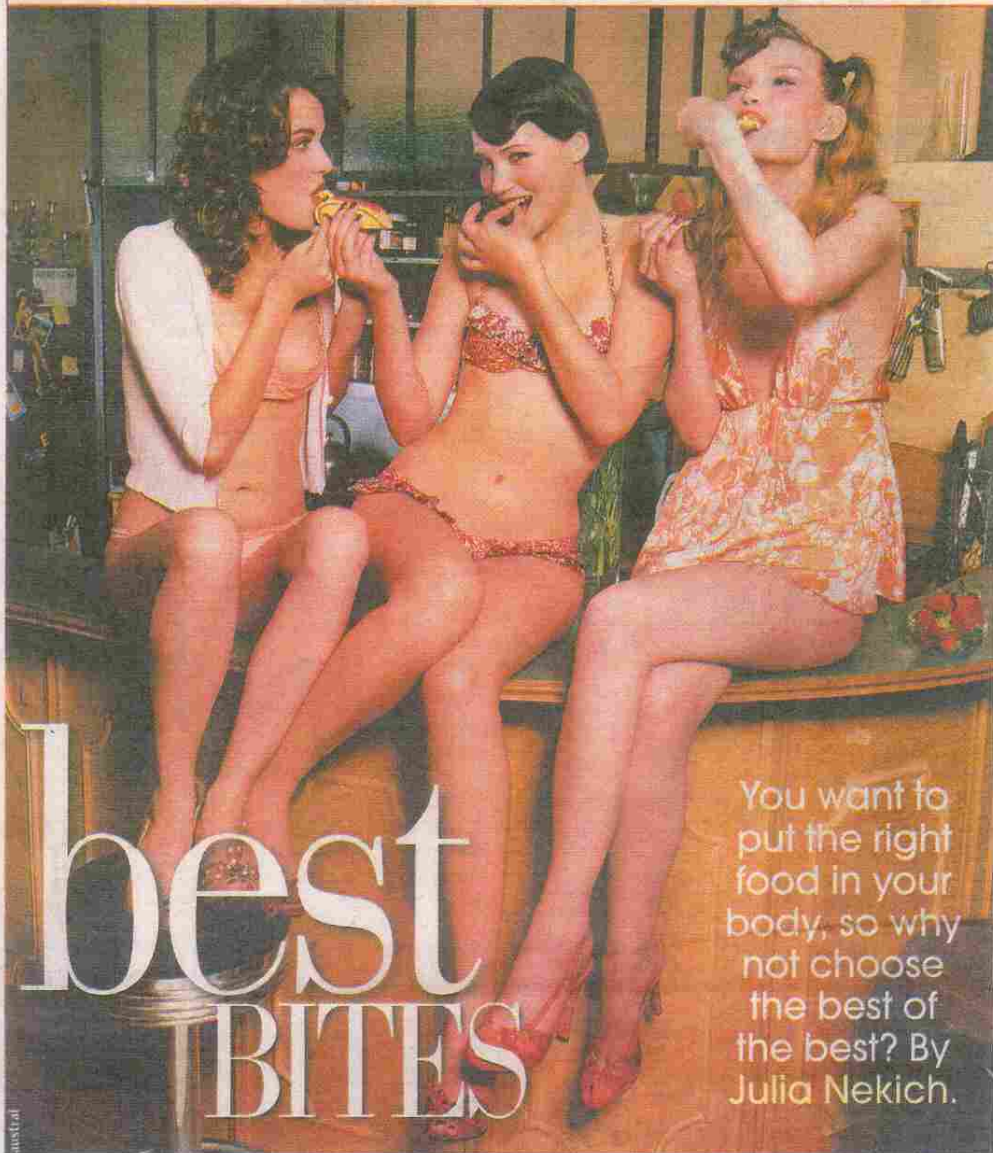
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best BITES

You want to put the right food in your body, so why not choose the best of the best? By Julia Nekich.

We know that a balanced diet of fruit, vegies, proteins, grains, dairy, legumes and nuts is the key to good health. Eating a wide array of foods ensures our bodies receive the full range of nutrients they need for maximum health.

But within each of the categories are standout foods in terms of nutrient density. "Foods that don't provide many kilojoules, while being high in essential vitamins and minerals, are nutrient dense," says Sharon Natoli, director of Food & Nutrition Australia and an accredited practising dietitian.

Knowing which foods deliver the most powerful doses of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fibre, healthy fats and phytochemicals can help us make better dietary choices. But Dr Trent Watson, accredited practising dietitian and spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia, says, "Variety is the spice of life - we still need to be conscious of other nutrient sources. We need variety between and within food groups."

We asked a panel of leading nutritionists and dietitians for their pick of the most nutrient-dense foods in 10 categories. The results were surprising.

CATEGORY: FRUIT

The winners: Goji berries and pawpaw

An apple a day might keep the GP away, but experts agree berries are a great source of nutrients. "Berries are a good source of folate, vitamin C and antioxidants, which help protect the body against the effects of ageing and diseases such as cancer," says Kate Marsh, accredited practising dietitian at Sydney's Northside Nutrition & Dietetics.

Many claim that goji berries - grown in Tibet, Mongolia and China - could be the most nutritionally dense food on the planet. According to www.gojiaustralia.com.au and www.goji-berry.com.au, they contain 19 amino acids, 21 trace chemicals, antioxidants, B vitamins, essential fatty acids and protein and have 500 times the amount of vitamin C (by weight) than oranges, and antifungal, anti-inflammatory and antibacterial ingredients. But they are expensive and are usually only available from health food stores.

A fruit that follows closely is pawpaw: "One pawpaw provides more than half your daily requirements for vitamin A and four times your RDI for vitamin C. It's also a good source of iron, magnesium and potassium and is high in fibre," Natoli says.

CATEGORY: VEGETABLES

The winner: English spinach

"The green leafy vegetables top the list when it comes to maximum amounts of nutrients in a serving - and top of the list is spinach," says Natoli. "It's full of fibre, B vitamins, vitamin C, vitamin A, potassium and iron."

"English spinach also contains lutein and zeaxanthin, two important antioxidants for the eyes," says nutritionist Catherine Saxelby. Saxelby, Natoli, Marsh and accredited practising dietitian Tania Ferraretto all agree that spinach is followed closely by the cruciferous vegetables: cauliflower, cabbage, brussels sprouts and especially broccoli.

"Broccoli is an excellent source of vitamin C, folate, iron, potassium, beta-carotene, calcium and important phytochemicals that help protect against cancer," Marsh says.

CATEGORY: MEAT

The winners: Kangaroo and liver

"Kangaroo is a great choice due to its low fat and saturated fat levels, and it has similar amounts of iron and zinc to beef and lamb," says Natoli.

Liver is another option. "Liver is no longer as popular as it used to be, but it has



everything in it – it's the storage organ for lots of soluble vitamins, including A and D, and minerals zinc and iron," says CSIRO associate professor Manny Noakes.

CATEGORY: FISH

The winners: Salmon, sardines and oysters

Salmon, sardines and oysters were all lauded.

Salmon stands out for its high levels of zinc and omega-3 fatty acids. "Omega-3 fats can help reduce blood clotting, prevent abnormal heart rhythms and reduce blood pressure," says Marsh. "Salmon is also low in saturated fat, and rich in protein, iodine and potassium. Its small edible bones are an important source of calcium."

Saxelby says that salmon's pink colour "means it's also a great source of beta-carotene, which gets converted into vitamin A in the body".

For Natoli, "Oysters and mussels top the list, being rich in protein, iron, zinc and B vitamins."

"If I had to pick one seafood," Noakes says, "it would be sardines. They deliver huge amounts of omega-3 and are the cheapest fish source of omega-3s."

The experts say there's no nutritional difference between fresh and canned salmon. But if you're buying canned, go for the red variety – it has higher levels of omega-3 fats than pink salmon.

CATEGORY: STARCHY FOODS

The winner: Brown rice

Compared with potatoes, white rice, pasta and noodles, "Brown rice would get my vote," Saxelby says. "It's wholegrain, high in fibre, and contains B vitamins, essential fatty acids, magnesium and iron."

The difference between brown and white rice is that white rice has had the layer of bran wrapped around the grain removed. Each has similar amounts of kilojoules, carbohydrates, fat and protein, but brown rice has additional nutrients.

CATEGORY: OIL

The winners: Linseed (flaxseed) and cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil

"My choice is linseed (flaxseed) oil for its rich omega-3 content," says Saxelby. It also contains essential omega-6 fatty acids.

Saxelby and Marsh say that olive oil is also an excellent choice. "But choose the cold-pressed extra virgin variety, as it's the least refined of all oils and gives you natural antioxidants," Saxelby says.

CATEGORY: DAIRY

The winner: Yoghurt

"Yoghurt is the best choice as it provides high amounts of calcium and protein," says Natoli.

Ferraretto says that yoghurt also provides healthy bacteria, which is



Category: Nuts

The winner: Almonds

All nuts and seeds are a healthy addition to the diet, as they are rich in unsaturated fatty acids, zinc, magnesium, calcium and other nutrients. But according to Saxelby and Natoli, almonds top the list.

"Almonds are an excellent source of fibre, protein, vitamin E, monounsaturated fats, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin B6 and other nutrients. Research has shown that eating a handful of almonds each day can reduce blood cholesterol levels by 25 per cent," Marsh says.

Saxelby says almonds stand out for their calcium content. "That's surprising for a nut. A third of a cup gives a quarter of a day's requirements of calcium. It's a good food for vegetarians."

beneficial for the digestive system. "Look for varieties that contain acidophilus and bifidus bacteria," Natoli adds.

"Yoghurt is pre-digested, contains less lactose, its calcium is more readily absorbed, and it contains probiotics," Saxelby says.

But Noakes says ricotta is under-appreciated. "Ricotta contains whey protein, which has an important effect on appetite control, and it's relatively unprocessed. It's also the cheapest source of protein." She adds that it has a lower fat content, almost twice the amount of calcium (225mg per 100g) and more than three times the amount of protein than milk.

CATEGORY: LEGUMES

The winner: Soybeans

Lentils, chickpeas and beans are all nutrient dense, "but my pick would be soybeans or tofu," Saxelby says.

"Soybeans are a complete protein – they contain all the essential amino acids," Marsh says. "Research has shown their benefits for heart health and has found that consuming 25g of soy protein per day can reduce total cholesterol by 9.3 per cent."

Ferraretto says soybeans (as well as chickpeas and lentils) are rich in fibre and antioxidants and can reduce the risk of cancer. "Soybeans can also help with menopausal symptoms," she says.

CATEGORY: HERBS AND FLAVOURS

The winner: Garlic

Garlic comes out the winner – even when compared with ginger and chillies.

"Garlic spans the divide between food and medicine," Saxelby says. She adds that garlic has antibacterial effects and thins the blood, which helps protect against heart disease and prevents blood from clotting. "The only thing is, you need to eat it raw!"

"Half to one clove per day has been shown to reduce cholesterol levels by 10 per cent," Marsh says. "One study also showed that cancer risk decreased with an increase in garlic intake."

in short Gina Flaxman dishes the latest health, fitness & diet news.

Something fishy

Only 24 per cent of Australians consume the recommended amount of fish per week, according to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. Omega-3s, found in fish oil, are essential for general health. To ensure you get your daily dose, Blackmores has launched the Omega range of supplements. Omega Daily is for those who eat less than the recommended two serves of fish per week. It's \$29.95 for 90 capsules.

www.blackmores.com.au

Cycling for cancer

You've heard about the Tour de France, but what about the Tour de Cure? This year sees the launch of a new annual event to raise money for cancer research. On May 28, a team of 23 will cycle from Brisbane to Sydney over 10 days to raise money for the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, the National Breast Cancer Foundation and Camp Quality. As well as taking time out for the gruelling event, and the training leading up to it, the participants have committed to raising \$10,000 to enter. The Tour de Cure aims to raise \$200,000, to be split between the three charities. To make a donation visit www.tourdecure.com.au