

Superfoods to Fall For

This year's harvest is a veritable medicine chest.

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Eating healthfully is really about abundance, not deprivation. There are at least a thousand substances in foods that help protect you from heart disease, cancer and premature aging. Many of them cause the bright colors in autumn fruits and vegetables, especially plentiful and delicious at this time of year. With good food like this, you never have to ask, "Am I going to live longer, or is it just going to *seem* longer?"

Pumpkins They're rich in beta carotene, which may reduce the risk of developing certain cancers and heart disease. They may also deter some aspects of aging. Pumpkins are low in calories, fat and sodium, and high in fiber. The seeds are high in protein and are loaded with magnesium and iron.

Butternut squash This is one of the healthiest vegetables around and also one of my favorites. Like other winter squash, butternut squash is high in vitamin C and beta carotene.

Pomegranates are especially high in antioxidants, such as ellagic acid, that reduce inflammation, which may be a factor in both heart disease and many types of cancer. Last year, RD wrote about the study my colleagues and I published in *The American Journal of Cardiology* finding that pomegranate juice reverses the progression of coronary heart disease. Now there's more good news: A new study found that pomegranate juice reduced the growth rate of prostate cancer. The juice improves blood flow to your heart and may promote blood flow to sexual organs, potentially improving sexual potency. Maybe that's why Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, was credited with planting the first pomegranate tree on Cyprus!

Tomatoes Tomatoes are rich in lycopene, which may help reduce the risk of heart disease, breast, lung and prostate cancer. Cooking helps activate lycopene, so tomato paste and sauce may be especially beneficial. Tomatoes also have vitamins A, C, E and potassium.

Bell peppers The red ones, especially, may help boost your immune system. They are excellent sources of vitamin C (three times as much as oranges) and beta carotene.

Ginger Ginger contains a compound called gingerol that may lower blood pressure and increase circulation. It may also help relieve migraines and arthritis pain by blocking inflammation-causing prostaglandins.

Kale, Swiss chard These and other dark green leafy vegetables contain lutein, which helps protect your vision against macular degeneration and cataracts. Kale is rich in beta carotene, vitamins C, E and folate, as well as calcium and magnesium, important for strong bones. And one cup of cooked Swiss chard has about a third of your RDA of magnesium, which helps keep nerve and muscle cells healthy.