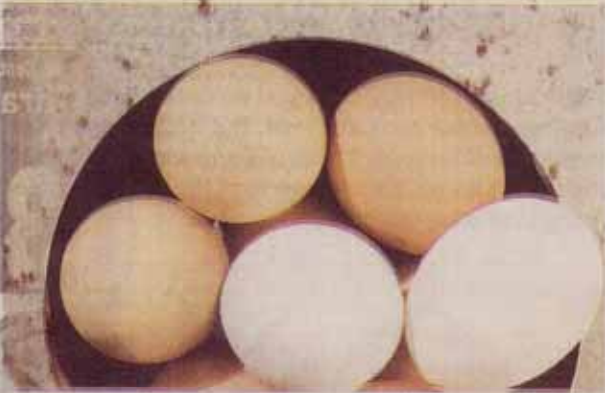


Superfoods for '06



You say you've got a resolution? Here are the top 10 healthy picks for this year



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January is the month for resolutions, and if eating healthier is right up there on your list, don't expect to do it all at once.

"If you are used to eating eggplant parm and sausage and peppers, you can't suddenly start eating just steamed broccoli instead," says Dana Jacobi, author of "12 Best Foods Cookbook" (Rodale Books). "The best way is to take baby steps. Make the sausage and peppers with low-fat turkey sausage, for instance."

So, here are the foods to eat more of this year (and a few to swear off, too):

APPLES: Apples, a good source of fiber, contain quercetin, which is a potent inflammation-fighter, Jacobi says. The skin is an especially rich source of quercetin. Try apples in a salad with watercress and spinach and a cracked mustard dressing, or in oatmeal with cinnamon and low-fat milk.

BEANS: Whether they're red or black, pinto or kidney, beans are a fine source of antioxidants, says dietician Jackie Newgent. "From the standpoint of weight management, beans help keep you full and satisfied because they're rich in soluble fiber." Red, pinto and black have the most antioxidants, Newgent says. Try them in chili, soups and quesadillas or puree in a dip to serve with toasted pita triangles.

BERRIES: All kinds of berries are terrific for you because they are disease fighters, Newgent says. Besides being rich in antioxidants, they provide a good amount of fiber, too. And you can get as much nutrition from frozen berries as from fresh. "Frozen berries are packed at the peak of ripeness," Newgent says. "Just be sure to watch for added sugar."

BROCCOLI: Abundant in antioxidants, this cruciferous veggie is one of the all-time healthiest items in the produce department. It's said to have antibacterial properties that may kill certain harmful bacteria, Jacobi says. Try chopping up leftover cooked broccoli and adding to soups, and use broccoli in dips, casseroles, stir-fries and lasagna.

CHOCOLATE: No, this does not mean you should run out and eat a bag of Snickers bars! But evidence does show that dark chocolate has the highest antioxidant content of any food, Jacobi says. Studies in which people ate dark chocolate have shown heart-protecting benefits, so allow yourself a small amount each day. Eat the darkest chocolate you can, Jacobi says.

EGGS: They are rich in lutein and zeaxanthin, says Newgent. These are nutrients believed to reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in those over age 65. From a caloric standpoint, they're also a bargain: An egg has just 75 calories. While you don't want to overdo, the guidelines are definitely loosening up in terms of egg

consumption, Newgent says. "For years, people have shied away from eggs, but they are nutritious and an excellent source of protein."

OATS: Since they provide the fiber that can lower blood cholesterol levels and reduce risk of heart disease, eat oats not just in oatmeal but in muffins, muesli and even in place of breadcrumbs as a coating for chicken. While all oats are healthy, whole oats (groats) are best because they contain the entire whole grain with just the hull removed.

SWEET POTATOES: These are a great complex carbohydrate with considerably more fiber and beta carotene than white potatoes. Try roasting them in a preheated, 400-degree oven until they are soft, buttery and nearly caramelized, and eat for a snack. You can also mash them up and season with a hint of molasses — comfort food that is actually good for you.

TOMATOES: These have not only lycopene but a tremendous range of other beneficial phytochemicals that have a protective effect against disease. Don't worry that tomatoes aren't in season right now: Cooked tomatoes con-

tain up to eight times more available lycopene than raw tomatoes.

WALNUTS: Besides being a rich source of "good" fats, they're the only nut that contains a significant amount of ellagic acid, a cancer-fighting antioxidant, Jacobi says. Eat a small handful (an ounce or an ounce and a half) each day. A great afternoon snack consists of an apple and a handful of walnuts. ♦

New Year no-nos

NITRITES: Stay away from processed meats like bacon and you'll reduce your consumption of these.

REFINED CARBS: Let this be your year to get over white potatoes and white rice.

PESTICIDES: Avoid as many as possible, Jacobi says, by keeping consumption of heavily sprayed foods as low as possible. To get a list of the most and the least pesticide-contaminated foods, visit www.foodnews.org/reportcard.php.