

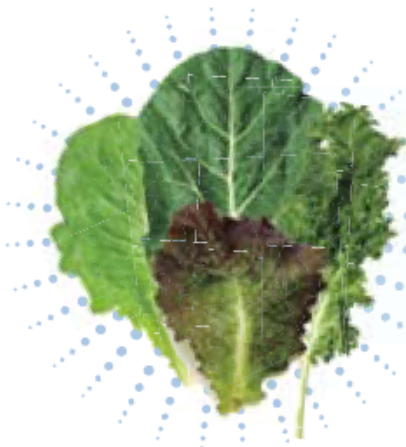


## *Functional Foods*

As sustenance and nourishment, food fuels our bodies and keeps us moving throughout the day. Some foods go a step further and actually protect our health and bodies by reducing the risk of certain diseases. These foods are known as “functional foods,” which the Institute of Medicine’s Food and Nutrition Board defines as “any food or food ingredient that may provide a health benefit beyond the traditional nutrients it contains.” Concerned about what qualifies? Chances are, you already have some of these functional foods on hand.



**Who knew chocolate** contains some of the same healthy chemicals as fruits and vegetables? That’s right – chocolate contains a nutritional component that may help in reducing the risk of heart disease. So as it melts in your mouth, chocolate may also be helping your heart. Prefer the treat in liquid form? Hot cocoa may also reduce the risk of heart disease (just skip the marshmallows).



**Leafy greens** are a guaranteed winner when it comes to functional foods, no matter how you look at it. Brimming with fiber, vitamins, minerals and plant-based nutrients, dark greens will improve your health when regularly included in a balanced diet. Kale, collards, Swiss chard, spinach and turnip greens are all excellent choices.



**Blueberries** may be small, but they pack a powerful antioxidant punch that has been shown to reduce the risk of cancer. The antioxidants found in blueberries have also been found to protect our bodies from free radicals that damage cells.



**Got yogurt?** The active cultures in yogurt add bacteria to the intestinal tract, aiding the digestive process. Be sure to look for yogurts that contain “live and active cultures” which contain beneficial bacteria. Yogurt also provides your body with a boost of calcium, which in turn may help reduce the risk of osteoporosis.



**Oats** are another highly-regarded super food, providing a high level of fiber that aids in digestion while also potentially lowering cholesterol and reducing the risk of heart disease. All it takes is a cup of oats per day to get the five to ten grams of fiber necessary to help keep your heart healthy!



**Fatty fish**, including salmon, mackerel, trout and sardines, contains high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which are known to improve both heart and brain health, and may also help lower cholesterol levels. In fact, the American Heart Association suggests two servings of fatty fish a week for a healthy, balanced diet.

#### Other functional foods include:

- Almonds
- Citrus fruits
- Cranberries
- Flax seed
- Garlic
- Lean beef
- Soy
- Spinach and leafy greens



As the science world continues to discover more benefits of functional foods, just remember that a well-balanced, varied diet is the key. As you plan your meals, remember these functional foods, and choose foods that will function in your best interest!