

Superfoods

The phenomenon of so-called “super foods” has swept the nation over the last few years, but it is only fairly recently that supermarkets have jumped on board the marketing bandwagon to promote these products. So is it just a craze that is likely to fizzle out over time or do these foods really contain properties that could change your life?

What does ‘super food’ mean

A super food is a natural food type that is known to have a particularly high nutrient content, typically anti-oxidants and vitamins. These are sometimes referred to as phytonutrients which, despite not actually being essential to humans for life, are proven to improve health in one way or another. Research has shown that they can boost your immune system, help prevent disease, and/or just make you feel better. Blueberries are a good example of a superfood (or superfruit) due to a long list of nutritional abundance, including anti-oxidants, vitamin C, manganese and dietary fibre, the contributing effect being bodily defense against cancers, improvements in circulation and a generally more robust immune system.

Which super food is best?

No one super food is better than another, as all offer unique nutritional value, and one individual could benefit differently from another individual. It is important not to think of nutrients on a scale of how much good they do, but to appreciate the value of a variety of different sources in order to reap the most benefit. My father once told me a story about a man who decided that carrots were the ultimate health food and offered more nutritional value than anything else (their abundance of beta carotene is alleged to significantly reduce heart disease); however he took this assumption a little too seriously and after excessive consumption died at the age of 50! This story may have been exaggerated over time, but the point is clear – the search for the perfect food is futile; we should look for a balanced diet for optimal health.

Miracle cure?

The name ‘super food’ gives it the impression of being something that might change your life, and I have come across many people that get excited by the mere prospect, but I think it is important to put it all into perspective. For health enthusiasts and perfectionists the discovery of super foods is a ground-breaking one as there is undisputed evidence that suggests they can reduce chances of disease, improve your immune system, and increase your lifespan. However, we shouldn’t get carried away with this statement. Firstly, if someone were to eat a plate of chips with gravy but follow it up with a punnet of blueberries the two wouldn’t cancel each other out! Super foods can only be beneficial to your overall health if you already lead a regularly balanced diet. Furthermore, eating anything listed as a super food in excess is likely to be potentially damaging. Fruits, for example, may be better than chocolate but still contain a lot of sugar and eaten in large quantities may result in fluctuating blood sugar levels and/or weight gain.

Summary

The benefits of super foods cannot be argued with, as there is evidence to show that they can improve various aspects of your health. However, more important elements of your diet should first be considered, such as your consumption of the right quantities of protein, carbohydrate, fat and other essential vitamins and minerals. Given a relatively balanced diet the introduction of a mixture of super foods can be of significant benefit, but only in sensible quantities to maximise the improvement of your overall health.