

7 SUPERFOODS TO HELP FIGHT CANCER

THE LATEST RESEARCH SHOWS THAT 30% OF ALL CANCERS ARE CAUSED BY A BAD DIET – SHOCKINGLY, THAT'S THE SAME AMOUNT AS SMOKING. OF COURSE, YOU'LL HAVE HEARD LOTS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EATING A WIDE VARIETY OF HEALTHY FOODS, BUT WHICH ONES REALLY PROTECT YOU AGAINST THE BIG C AND WHY?

1 CABBAGE

Along with its family members (broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts), cabbage contains more cancer-fighting plant chemicals than any other veg. While some foods target particular cancers, cabbages defend against pretty much everything, including breast, stomach, bladder, lung and prostate cancers. Basically, they act as a reservoir for lots of different cancer killers and slow down the development of cancer by stopping carcinogens (cancerous substances) damaging your cells.

ARM YOURSELF: To make sure you get the maximum amount of cancer killers, steam or stir-fry veg rather than boiling your veg, and buy fresh rather than frozen.



3 TURMERIC

This tasty spice has been used for centuries in Ayurvedic medicine, and now modern science shows it has the power to stop cancer in its tracks. Its bright yellow colour comes from compounds called curcuminoids, which are also believed to fight off stomach, intestinal, skin and liver cancers. Curcumin makes cancerous cells self-destruct, and also stops tumours forming new blood vessels, starving them of energy.

ARM YOURSELF: The one problem with turmeric is that it's very poorly absorbed by the body. However, you can boost its bioavailability a thousand times just by combining it with pepper. Try adding a daily teaspoon of turmeric to soups, salad dressings or pasta dishes, then season it.



2 GARLIC

Garlic is a key part of your anti-cancer arsenal. It has the power to prevent cancers of the digestive system, particularly oesophageal, stomach and colon cancers. These types of cancer are caused by nitrosamines, harmful compounds formed by our gut bacteria from the nitrites we eat. Nitrites are a type of food additive commonly found in pickled foods and processed meats such as sausages, bacon and ham. Garlic helps stop nitrites turning into nitrosamines, so they can't trigger the mutations in our DNA that cause cancer.

Garlic and other members of the allium family (onions, shallots, leeks and chives) have also been found to 'switch off' cancerous compounds and stimulate the systems that flush them from the body.

ARM YOURSELF: Use freshly crushed garlic rather than garlic supplements as the anti-cancer molecules are released when the plant is crushed, chopped or chewed. Eat a minimum of two cloves a week.



Words: Lynne Hyland. Pictures: Alamy

4 SOY

Soy has a big effect on cancers triggered by hormones, such as breast and prostate cancer. These diseases are relatively rare in Asia where soy (edamame, miso, tofu) has always been a big part of the diet. Soy is rich in isoflavones, compounds which have virtually the same shape as oestrogen. This means isoflavones slot neatly into the body's oestrogen receptor sites so cancerous tumours aren't supplied with the hormone they need to grow. (The breast cancer drug Tamoxifen works in a similar way.)

However, it's important to avoid getting too much of a good thing, as high levels of soya have been found to increase several markers of breast cancer risk. There are concerns over high-dose isoflavone supplements, which provide far more isoflavones than the traditional Asian diet and may stimulate hormone-sensitive tissue to grow abnormally.

ARM YOURSELF: To get the benefits of soy without the risks, eat 50g of the whole food, such as raw or dry roasted soya beans, and avoid isoflavone supplements.



GARLIC BLOCKS THE DNA MUTATIONS THAT CAN LEAD TO CANCER

5 BERRIES

Superfoods like strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and cranberries are a concentrated source of cancer killers. Ellagic acid (rich in strawberries and raspberries) defends against DNA damage and also seems to make cells more effective at ridding themselves of carcinogens. New research shows ellagic acid blocks the proteins that normally dissolve the tissue around tumours and clear a path for them to grow. Blueberries and cranberries contain compounds that seem to stop cancer cells growing, particularly colon cancer cells. They also seem to disrupt the spread of tumours by cutting off their support network of blood vessels.

ARM YOURSELF: Frozen berries still contain cancer killers, so go for this option when fresh varieties are out of season. Go for cranberries rather than cranberry juice, as this is lower in anti-cancer compounds.



6 TOMATOES

The humble tomato has an incredible ability to home in on the prostate and protect it against cancer, particularly the more aggressive forms of the disease. Studies suggest it's no coincidence that countries where toms are munched in high amounts, such as Italy, Spain and Mexico, have much lower rates of prostate cancer than the UK and US. The secret seems to be lycopene, the pigment that gives toms their colour. It seems to act directly on the hormone androgen, which is involved in abnormal and excessive growth of the prostate. When men eat lycopene, it accumulates in the prostate area, helping to stop cancer getting a foothold.

ARM YOURSELF: Lycopene is much better absorbed when tomatoes are cooked rather than raw. Fat also boosts the availability of lycopene, so tomatoes cooked in olive oil are a great way to get the maximum benefit. And of course, a splash of tomato ketchup is a good source of lycopene too.



7 GREEN TEA

Green tea is the number one liquid cancer quencher. Unlike your builder's brew, it's a great source of catechins, which have been found to inhibit skin cancers, breast cancers, lung cancers, oesophageal cancers and colorectal cancers. Of all anti-cancer substances tested, the catechin EGCG has been found to have the most powerful impact on tumour growth by cutting off their food and oxygen supply.

ARM YOURSELF: Not all green teas are created equal. Studies suggest Japanese green teas contain more anti-cancer compounds than Chinese teas. You also need a little patience to get the full benefits, as tea that's brewed for five minutes or less only has a fifth of the catechins of tea brewed for 8-10 mins. Drink three cups a day and space them out to keep your supply of cancer fighters continually high. (Try Clearspring Organic Sencha Green Tea, £2.69 at Waitrose and health food shops.)



Adapted from *Foods To Fight Cancer* by Professor Richard Beliveau and Dr Denis Gingras (Dorling Kindersley, £14.99). Celebs On Sunday readers can buy it for the special price of £11.99, inc p&p, by calling the DK bookshop on 08700 707 717. Quote Sunday Mirror/Foods and the ISBN number, 9781405319157. Offer subject to availability. Allow up to 14 days for delivery. Offer open to UK residents only.