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Superfood fight: which of these 12 foods is best for your health?

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Is quinoa or brown rice better? How about strawberries vs blueberries, or Greek yogurt vs. regular yogurt. We have the answers



Quinoa vs brown rice

The good news is they're both gluten free. While quinoa has double the fat content of brown rice, it also has more protein, fibre and a lower glycaemic index. Both grains contain bone-building magnesium, but quinoa has a higher percentage of it, as well as four times the immune-building iron.

Brown rice has been promoted over white because it still contains the germ which houses much of the grain's nutrients and fibre. A cup of brown rice has 14 per cent of the recommended daily fibre intake. Quinoa tops that at 21 per cent.

Quinoa also has higher folate content, which is particularly good for pregnant women or those trying to conceive.

According to Raymond Chung Tsz-man, nutritionist from Albert Place Practice and Mineralysis, the most outstanding nutritional quality of quinoa is that it contains all essential amino acids and has a higher protein content than brown rice.

Both quinoa and brown rice possess similar anti-inflammation and anti-oxidation properties. If you're allergic to brown rice, quinoa could be a good alternative, and vice versa.

Chia seeds vs flax seeds

Both seeds have a similar number of calories and are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, an essential nutrient for brain function and development, reduction of inflammation and the risk of heart disease.

Chia seeds contain more water-soluble fibre that facilitates cholesterol normalisation and are packed with antioxidants, but many of these are of plant origin so are less likely to be absorbed

by the body. Chia's high protein and fibre content might help weight-loss by reducing hunger. However, two trials to date have shown no clear evidence of any benefit in terms of weight-loss or reduced risk of heart disease.

By far the most common antioxidants circulating in our bodies are the ones we make ourselves - glutathione and uric acid - followed by vitamins A, C and E, which we get from normal food. According to Duane Mellor, assistant professor in dietetics at the University of Nottingham and a spokesman for the British Dietetic Association, many of the antioxidants in chia seeds are there to stop the plant's oils going rancid, or to protect them from sunlight damage, and may not be that available to our bodies.

Chia seeds contain a complete protein and are richer in fibre and calcium. Flax seeds have some protein, too, but are not complete in amino acids. But they do have high amounts of lignans, plant-based antioxidants and phytochemicals that can help prevent prostate and breast cancer.

Blueberries vs strawberries

When comparing equal portions of blueberries and strawberries, the latter contain more calories and carbohydrates because strawberries have more water content, says Karen Chong, registered dietitian at Matilda International Hospital.

Strawberries are a better source of vitamin C and potassium. But for vitamin A, blueberries are more preferable. Both fruits contain anthocyanin (the red or purplish-blue pigment), which is anti-inflammatory and antioxidant.

Chung cautions that strawberries contain higher levels of oxalic acid, which is not suitable for those suffering from joint pain and kidney problems.

Antioxidant-rich blueberries and the bioactive phytonutrients that give them their deep-blue colour provide a wide range of potential health benefits: from brain health, gut and heart health to cancer prevention, improved urinary tract function and a reduction in diabetes risk.

A study conducted at the University of Cincinnati found that consumption of blueberry-supplemented diets improved memory function and mood in older adults with early memory decline. Another study, by Harvard Medical School, found that eating one or more servings of blueberries each week may help slow cognitive degeneration by several years in women.



Salmon vs tuna

Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, oily fish eaten once or twice a week may increase our lifespan, suggests a research study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. According to lead author Dr Dariush Mozaffarian, associate professor of medicine at Harvard, we need omega-3 because 95 per cent of our cells' membranes are made of fat. He recommends eating one or two servings of fatty fish per week to optimise blood levels of omega-3.

Both salmon and tuna contain omega-3 fish oil, but salmon has it in larger quantities. But because it contains more fat, it has a higher calorie content.

Salmon is safer than tuna because it contains lower levels of mercury. Since tuna fish is a predator, it tends to be bigger and contains more mercury. This may be a concern for women of child-bearing age and pregnant women, and isn't suitable for young children. Mercury can affect the brain development of the fetus and children.

Both types of fish have their drawbacks if consumed too often. Also the type of tuna and salmon - whether fresh or canned - also influences how healthy these fish are.

Greek yogurt vs regular yogurt

While both Greek and regular yogurt are derived from milk, the major difference is Greek yogurt contains much less whey (the liquid section of milk) than regular yogurt, so it's particularly suitable for those who are allergic to whey proteins.

For the full-fat version, Greek yogurt has about three times more fat content than regular yogurt. This makes it thicker and creamier than regular yogurt.

With the non-fat version, both Greek and regular yogurt have a similar calorie content. Non-fat Greek yogurt has less lactose and almost double the protein content than regular non-fat

yogurt.

However, as some calcium may be lost with water during the production process, non-fat Greek yogurt has less bone-strengthening mineral calcium than regular yogurt.

Those who are lactose intolerant could choose non-fat Greek yogurt over regular yogurt, while those who require more calcium for bone health should opt for non-fat regular yogurt.

Walnuts vs almonds

Both walnuts and almonds are beneficial to cardiovascular health. According to a 2001 study conducted by the University of Oslo in Norway, walnuts have a much higher total antioxidant concentration (almost 50 to 85 times higher) than that of almonds.

In traditional Chinese medicine and nutrition, walnuts are believed to serve as a tonic to the brain and kidneys, while almonds are beneficial for cough alleviation.

While walnuts are higher in calories and fat, almonds have more fibre and protein. Almonds lack the plant-based omega-3 ALA found in walnuts, but are a rich source of calcium.

For people who don't eat fish, walnuts are a good alternative source of omega-3. For someone who is lactose intolerant or doesn't like milk, almonds are a good alternative calcium source.

Still baffled by health foods? Chung says: "Of course, all of the foods mentioned are very nutritive and it's good to include them in one's diet and consume them rotationally as long as there is no food allergy towards certain foods."

"If one is allergic to certain healthy foods, the expected health effects of it will be reduced and even cancelled out by the allergic and inflammatory response triggered by it."

Hence, there are significant variations in the beneficial outcomes of the same healthy food among different people.

The bottom line: no single food can fulfil all beneficial health effects and nutritional requirements.

The concept of a well-balanced and rotational food intake is important to ensure proper nutrition and minimise food allergies.

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