



50

Best &

SECRET SUPERFOOD?
Swiss cheese was the surprising food most closely linked with better cognitive health in a recent scientific study.



HEALTH FALLACY?
Raw food isn't always superior. The nutrient beta-carotene is best absorbed when veg is cooked, along with 3g to 5g of fats.

Worst Foods For Men

If your appetite for nutritional knowledge is as greedy as that for uncompromising eats, you've come to the right place. We've consulted the experts and trawled through the journals to compile this list of the foodstuffs that deserve to be vindicated and vilified in 2022. **'Add to basket'**

WORDS BY TROY DA COSTA - PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL HEDGE - STYLING BY NICO GHIRLANDO 

The Taste Makers

Our food experts



Kirsten Brooks

Registered nutritionist at eatyourselftohealth.com, with a focus on developing mental wellbeing



Kazuwa Mandikate

Nutrition therapist and lifestyle coach at kazuwa-nutritional-therapy.com



Libby Linford

Nutritionist and functional medicine practitioner at surreycentreofnutrition.com



Adnan Chowdhury

Lecturer at the University of East London, S&C coach and personal trainer

25

Fresh Superfoods

These certified health-enhancers will liven up your daily menu and benefit both body and brain, without emptying your wallet



04/ Celeriac Puree

It's a great source of vitamin K, 'which is associated with strong bones', says Brooks, thereby reducing your risk of a training-related mishap. Moderating your carb or calorie intake? Sub it in for your usual rice or spuds, suggests Brooks.

05/ Swiss Cheese

It seems 2020 wasn't all bad news: a study from Iowa State University correlated cheese intake with protection against cognitive decline – 'a pleasant surprise', the scientists said. The Swiss variety is rich in protein and useful probiotics.



01/ Black Garlic

Once niche, now everywhere – as ketchup, in supplement form or as sweet 'snacking' cloves – black garlic's antioxidant activity rockets during fermentation, reports a Korean study*. Compounds like alkaloids and flavonoids have huge benefits, including reducing the inflammation that can impair memory and brain function. Dark magic.

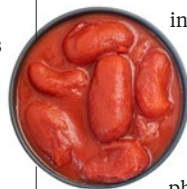


02/ Onsen Tamago

Scorching your eggs can reduce their nutrient content. These Japanese 'hot spring eggs' are cooked low and slow, resulting in a custardy texture – and preserving their amino acids, vitamin D and carotenoids. Boil a litre of water, turn off the heat, add 200ml cold water, 2 eggs and cover for 12 minutes.

03/ Crickets

As well as a solution to our over-reliance on animal protein, crickets have legs as a legit superfood. They're a source of muscle-supporting nutrients such as magnesium, calcium, zinc, copper and iron, and contain the prebiotic chitin, which promotes a healthy gut.



07/ Tinned Tomatoes

Been saving up for a sunny summer getaway? Lycopene and other carotenoids found in tomatoes may reduce the harmful effects of UV rays,' explains Brooks. 'Opt for plum tomatoes, as they contain more phytonutrients.' Cooked beats raw for bioavailability: we rate tinned San Marzano varieties for flavour.



08/ Fresh Figs

'They're a powerhouse of minerals,' says Linford, 'which may help to control blood pressure, as well as being rich in fibre for healthy bowel function.' That ticks off two notable health issues for men over 40. As a snack, they're so-so. But combine them with rocket, feta and balsamic and... bellissimo.



09/ Yuzu

This tangerine-sized east Asian fruit has been cropping up all over UK menus, and is predicted to land on supermarket shelves soon in the form of mustards, dressings and pickles. 'The flavonoids hesperidin and naringin, found in its skin and flesh, may reduce excess blood clotting, which is linked with a higher risk of heart disease and stroke,' says Brooks.



10/ Saffron

There's a reason we all feel better after a good biriyani. Studies have shown that the Persian spice contains compounds associated with better mental health. 'It may improve mood by increasing the action of the neurotransmitter serotonin, and by reducing the impact of chronic stress on the brain,' suggests Brooks.



11/ Sour Aubergine

'Fermented veg – also referred to as fizzy veg – are superfoods for gut health,' says Linford. But if you're hungry for more options than sauerkraut and kimchi, try this eastern European alternative. What's more, 'aubergine is rich in fibre, as well as antioxidants that help limit oxidative stress', Linford adds.



12/ Plantain

Add this African and Latin staple to your post-gym carb repertoire. Chowdhury points to plantain's impressive vitamin C content, while also flagging a German study in which muscle soreness and recovery rates fell when footballers fuelled up on the fruit. Grill on a barbecue or peel and roast in the oven.



13/ King Oyster Mushroom

'Not just "king" for their size, but also for their nutritional benefits,' says Linford. 'These dynamos of fungi contain beta-glucans, known for their immune-modulating properties, helping to protect from disease. They might benefit heart health, too.'



14/ Purple Potatoes

Admittedly, their USP is that they look cool in photos, but these amethyst-like tubers have nutritional merits, too: 'Anthocyanins cause the purple pigment in foods,' says Mandikate. 'These antioxidants have been shown to support neurological health.'



15/ Oxtail

Give your next stew a meaty upgrade. 'Oxtail is a source of calcium, essential to keep bones strong, while its selenium is an antioxidant,' says Chowdhury. It's popular with athletes due to its ability to support muscle elasticity, he says.

16/ Green Papaya

This Thai-salad staple is too good to save for your monthly takeaway. 'Its antioxidants may reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes,' says Brooks, 'while its lycopene is associated with improved skin health. It also contains papain: a protein-digesting enzyme.' Which makes it the ideal accompaniment for your stir-fried beef.

17/ Anchovy Paste

'A rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, anchovies are associated with heart and brain health, and contain helpful minerals, too,' says Linford. Not keen on sticking them in salads? Buy as a paste and add a squeeze to sauces for a salty, umami kick.



18/ Broad Beans

A top source of copper and manganese, which support fat loss and blood-sugar management. Eat yours in the form of ful medames – a traditional Egyptian breakfast dish with cumin, herbs, lemon and chilli. 'It's a great source of plant-based protein and fibre,' says Linford.

19/ Leeks

When it comes to the allium family, onion and garlic hog all the glory. They shouldn't: leeks contain the same heart-healthy, anti-inflammatory compounds, says Mandikate. 'Plus, they're a great addition to soups.' Leeks also contain a substance called kaempferol, which has been linked to a reduced cancer risk.

20/ Tinned Artichokes

An underappreciated nutritional powerhouse, artichokes 'contain folate, vitamins K and C and are a great source of fibre', says Mandikate. Their cynarin content also helps to break down fats. Don't bother prepping them yourself: buy tinned, chop, dress and add to any meat or pasta dish.



23/ Ostrich Steak

'It's comparable to beef in many ways,' Chowdhury says, dishing up B12, iron and zinc. 'Ostrich might help to boost blood oxygen delivery and muscle mass in athletes,' he suggests. It's lean, too – and available via British farms.



21/ Chocolate

In need of a pick-me-up? A study of younger men from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece linked flavonoids of the kind found in cocoa to a 32% reduced chance of erectile dysfunction. Pair your square with a shot of espresso – which has similar powers – to amplify the effects.



22/ Grilled Mackerel

Opt for handline-caught mackerel if you want your oily fish to be planet-friendly and sustainable. It also happens to be incredible grilled whole on the barbecue with oil, salt and lemon. Mackerel is one of the best sources of vital EPA and DHA fats, plus vit D for testosterone production. True man food.

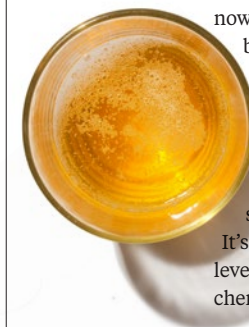
24/ Whole Milk

'Since the 1980s, the concern regarding whole milk has been its fat content, but in a 2012 meta-analysis*, scientists failed to find any convincing observational research linking dairy fat to heart disease or obesity,' says Chowdhury. It's also a cheap post-workout drink. 'Research shows its 3:1 ratio of carbohydrate to protein is effective for recovery.'



25/ Low-ABV Beer

Yes, they're everywhere right now, but your 0.5% brew has benefits beyond keeping you fit for the Friday work catch-up. A Spanish study* found a bottle a night reduced anxiety and improved sleep in stressed workers. It's thought that hops raise levels of the 'calming' brain chemical GABA.



25 Overrated Eats

Ditch the sanctimonious superfads and eat the stuff you really want instead. These health imposters simply aren't worth the hype

01/ Low-Fat Yoghurt

Where creamy dairy and sugars are removed, they must be replaced. Many times, that sub-in is sucralose, which a recent University of Southern California study linked to an increase in appetite – worth noting if supposedly diet-friendly snacks leave you reaching for something less than salubrious minutes later.



02/ Agave Syrup

'Although it has a lower glycaemic index [a measure of how quickly a food affects blood glucose] than table sugar, it still contains a lot of fructose,' says Brooks. Too much can overwhelm the liver. 'In the long-term, this raises the risk of fatty liver disease.' In other words, don't give yourself carte blanche with this golden syrup.



03/ Vitamin Gummies

There's nothing wrong with employing a little nutritional back-up – but you can get too much of a good thing. With gummies now available to boost everything from immunity to focus to sleep, make sure you know what you're chewing. 'They can also contain a lot of sugar and artificial colourings,' says Brooks. Once you've popped, make sure you stop.



04/ Paleo Brownies

Though it's popular on Instagram, Chowdhury likens the paleo baking trend to 'a three-wheeled car in a drag race': it doesn't matter how good the engine is. With zero gluten and dairy, but plenty of coconut sugar, they're nothing but expensive cakes. Your stone-age ancestors did without the recipe, anyway.

05/ Soy Jerky

The latest in imitation processed meats that most vegans never asked for. As Brooks puts it: 'It may be quite high in protein, but many varieties can be high in sugar, too, which can cause blood-sugar imbalances and lead to cravings.' Fill up on stir-fried, seasoned tofu instead.



06/ Corn Cakes

The now commonly spotted chocolate-coated biscuit alternative appears, at first glance, to be the healthy option. But gram-for-gram, they contain the same number of calories as a chocolate digestive (and don't taste as good dunked in a cuppa). Plus, they're not very satiating, says Brooks.



07/ Salad Dressing

The downfall of many a well-intentioned light lunch: 'Lots of supermarket varieties are full of sugars, saturated fats, salt, additives and preservatives,' says Linford. In which case, you may as well have a side of chips with your greens (by all means, do). 'All you really need is olive oil, lemon juice and balsamic or apple cider vinegar,' she says.

08/ Shirataki Noodles

AKA 'miracle noodles' (is that a red flag I see?), these are fat-free, gluten-free and all but calorie-free. 'Some things really are too good to be believed,' says Linford. 'Made from a fibre called glucomannan, they can cause bloating, flatulence and diarrhoea.' What was wrong with ramen anyway?



09/ Root Juice

Ginger, turmeric, beetroot and co might be concentrated sources of health-promoting, inflammation-fighting nutrients – but be mindful of other ingredients if you're swerving sugar. Most roots, juiced on their own, don't taste great, so are bulked out with sweet fruits.



10/ Coconut

The superfood du jour is celebrated for its metabolism-boosting benefits. It's true that replacing less-healthy fats with coco can support weight management – but its effects are fairly minimal. With 150 calories in 100ml of milk and 300 in an 80g snack pack, you might be better off shying away.



11/ Pasteurised Kombucha

Not all 'booch is made equal. At its best, it's a fermented tea, 'teeming with good bacteria', says Linford. But some brands pasteurise their drinks, killing off probiotics, or add unnecessary extra sugar after fermentation. For best results, go raw with less than 5g of sugar per 100ml.



12/ Butter Coffee

'I get it. It's a quick, low-carb breakfast alternative that gives you an energy boost,' says Linford. 'But omitting breakfast means missing an opportunity to stock up on nutrients.' Plus, scrambled eggs beat butter for essential vitamins – and satisfaction.



13/ Oat Granola

Ever felt bloated after a big bowl of cereal? 'Shop-bought granola can be hard to digest for some,' Mandikate says – not to mention the sugar content. 'Traditionally, grains such as oats were soaked or fermented before cooking to increase nutrient bioavailability and digestibility. Try overnight oats with nuts, grains and fruit, instead.'



14/ Tinned Soup

According to Chowdhury, 'up to 26% of the vitamins, minerals and essential amino acids in chicken are lost during tinning'. Water-soluble nutrients – notably vitamins B and C – are first to be drained, while many soups are high in salt to compensate for a lack in flavour. Stock it as a back-up – just don't lean on it for your micro targets.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID SYKES; STUDIO 33; GETTY IMAGES. *SOURCES: KYUNG HEE UNIVERSITY; HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH; UNIVERSITY OF EXTREMADURA

15/ Natural Protein Bars

'Natural' is a relative term; many plant-based bars are packed with syrups, coconut sugar and concentrated fruit juice. Check the ratio of protein to sugar, suggests Chowdhury. If there are considerably more grams of the latter, what you're eating is an energy bar – useful in its own right, but not much of a protein top-up.



16/ Guarana

With more caffeine than coffee, this seed is often used in energy drinks as a 'natural' energy source. But sensibly: there's limited evidence of its efficacy as a weight-loss aid or athletic-enhancer compared with dependable joe. Too much can cause anxiety, insomnia and palpitations.



17/ Protein Bread

A slice of good old wholemeal contains a helpful 4g to 5g of protein; splicing your grains with protein powder, however, adds more to the price than it does to its nutritional cred. If you're going to spend extra, Mandikate favours sourdough: the fermentation process improves absorption of calcium, zinc, iron and magnesium, he says.



18/ Flaxseed Oil

This is often pushed as a plant-based source of omega-3. It's a rich source of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) – but this is considerably less useful to your heart and brain than the DHA and EPA found in fish. Get your fix from an algae-based supp instead and you'll do swimmingly.

19/ Farmed Salmon

Not only is intensive fish farming bad news for marine life, farmed salmon is more likely to contain harmful chemicals such as PCBs and dioxins, says Mandikate. Go organic or Aquaculture Stewardship Council-certified for your eggs royale.



20/ CBD Edibles

From gummy bears to truffles to lattes, CBD-infused foods are in high demand. But the not-so-dope bit? Almost all studies demonstrating their anxiety- or stress-relieving potential look at doses of 300mg or more. Nothing close to the tiny dash in your green-hued snacks.

21/ Raw Carrots

A bag of batons might suffice as a portable snack, but crunching on raw carrots is an inferior way to score nutrients. Cooking helps to break down the veg's thick cell walls, making it far easier to absorb beta-carotene: a nutrient linked to better vision, skin health and immunity.



22/ 'Breakfast' Muffins

See also: breakfast bars, biscuits and bakes. 'You're setting yourself up for a morning sugar crash, fatigue and cravings for more sweets,' says Linford. Instead, try filling a muffin tray with beaten egg, finely chopped veg, Gruyère and pepper for an alternative, equally portable, breakfast.

23/ Jackfruit

This tropical fruit grown in South America, Africa and Asia has become a regular on the meat-substitute aisle. When cooked with barbecue seasoning, it mimics the taste and texture of pulled pork – but at just 1.5g of protein per 90 calories, it's all carbs and no muscle.



24/ White Chocolate

Multiple studies have found that chocolate contains handy flavanols, which benefit your heart, brain and skin. However, that doesn't extend to the pale stuff. 'White chocolate doesn't actually contain any cacao solids,' says Mandikate – the bit that does you good.



25/ Moringa

Purported to do everything from help manage diabetes to treat asthma symptoms, powdered moringa leaf now sells for £8 per 100g. Like most leafy greens, it is a source of vitamins and minerals, but that's about it.

