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7 super foods for seniors

Recent long-term research studies have pointed to a number of nutrients that many seniors lack but are especially valuable for those who have a risk or history of heart disease, stroke or Alzheimer's disease. Here are seven "super foods" that are loaded with these essential nutrients. Some of the foods on this list may even surprise you.

1. Salmon or other fatty fish

Salmon and other cold water fish, such as tuna, sardines or mackerel (**but avoid tilapia**—see *Senior Care News* on page 6) are low in calories and saturated fat, yet high in protein. Most important, these fish are rich in a unique type of health-promoting fat, the essential fatty acid, DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), better known as "omega-3."

Omega-3 essential fatty acid (DHA) optimizes levels of triglycerides which carry fat in your bloodstream, reducing the low density LDL (bad)

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Home Care Assistance News

New location! Home Care Assistance celebrates the opening of our newest office, located in **Little Rock/Hot Springs, Arkansas.**

Strokes and "mini strokes"

How to spot them and what to do.

Strokes have been called "the silent killer" because many people don't even realize or take action when they (or their loved ones) are experiencing one. This is unfortunate, because immediate medical attention can do more than save a life; it can even reduce or eliminate lasting effects of a stroke.

Nearly 700,000 Americans and 15 million people worldwide suffer strokes every year, many of them fatal. A stroke is a sudden loss of blood supply to a part of the brain, usually because of a blockage or bursting of an artery to the brain. When that part of the brain stops working, the part of the body it controls also stops working.



Mini strokes, major threat

Transient Ischemic Attacks (called TIAs or often "mini strokes") are tiny blood supply interruptions in the brain that resolve within 24 hours. Most TIA symptoms are the same as major strokes, only they resolve themselves within a few minutes to a day.

Drop attacks, which cause the person to fall suddenly without warning (with or without losing consciousness), happen when a TIA occurs at the base of the brain.

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7 super foods (continued):

cholesterol linked to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, while improving the high HDL (good) cholesterol that fights deposits in the arteries.

There is strong evidence linking low levels of DHA to memory loss and other symptoms of dementia. A 10-year study of 1,000 older individuals showed

that low DHA level was a significant risk factor for the onset of Alzheimer’s disease. (Archives of Neurology, November 2006)

Why not just take fish oil supplements? Norwegian researchers studied the absorption of omega-3 from salmon compared to fish oil capsules and found that enjoying salmon or tuna just twice per week raised blood levels of omega-3 even more effectively than taking daily fish oil supplements.

Caregiver spotlight

Many of our caregivers come from diverse backgrounds of experience and talent—backgrounds they put to use in unique ways in caring for their clients. Sharon Massey, of Home Care Assistance in Albuquerque, NM, is a perfect example of this diversity. A CNA



*Caregiver of the Month:
Sharon Massey*

(certified nursing assistant) and an HHA (home health aide), Sharon has been caregiving for nearly 15 years. Her experience with Christian missionaries, natural healing, traumatic injury recovery and hospice has brought significant depth to the level of care she provides.

She also developed a highly-nutritional shake, including fresh fruit, flax seed, soy milk and ice cream—which has even brought on a rally in many of her hospice clients.

Sharon says, **“The measure of my success is complete client satisfaction!”**

Outside of caregiving, Sharon continues to enjoy much success in her hobbies as an award-winning portrait artist and a horsewoman in eventing and thoroughbred racing!

2. Walnuts, almonds or other nuts

Considerable scientific evidence suggests that eating one ounce per day of certain nuts may reduce the risk of heart disease. In 2003, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved this claim exclusively for walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, pecans, pistachios and peanuts.

Although nuts are a higher-fat food, they are cholesterol-free. Most of their fat comes from heart-healthy unsaturated fat, including omega-3 (DHA). In fact, one ounce of walnuts (about a handful) is all that is needed to meet the daily omega-3 dietary recommendation by the National Academies’ Institute of Medicine.

Walnuts and other nuts (especially Brazil nuts) are also one of the best sources for what scientists have called the **top three nutritional deficiencies: magnesium, manganese and selenium**. These play a role in more than 100 biochemical reactions in the human body, including critical heart and nerve functions.

One ounce of nuts also provides 35 percent of the RDA (recommended dietary allowance) for **vitamin E**. A study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association (June 26, 2002) suggests vitamin E may help protect people against Alzheimer's disease. (Incidentally, the study also found vitamin E in the form of supplements was *not* associated with a reduction in the risk of Alzheimer's disease.)

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7 super foods (continued):

Walnuts also are recommended as part of the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), a dietary plan clinically proven to significantly reduce blood pressure.

3. A carrot a day for vitamin A

Oxidative damage to brain cells contributes to neurological degeneration and the development of dementia. That’s why anti-oxidants such as vitamin A (beta-carotene), C, E and flavonoids are so important—especially for the elderly. Many complementary studies have shown that persons who consumed higher levels of Vitamin A and other anti-oxidants over several years had substantially decreased levels of Alzheimer’s disease. This was even more pronounced among smokers.

“The idea that eating a carrot a day over a lifetime may preserve cognitive function in later years deserves considerable attention.”

—Mary O’Brien, MD, *Alzheimer’s: Prevention of the Disease and Other Dementias*, 2005.

A new Dutch study links diets rich in four antioxidants—beta-carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E and zinc—to lower odds of developing age-related macular degeneration.

Nothing beats a carrot as a powerful source of beta-carotene (which your body converts to vitamin A). **One carrot (7 1/2" long) delivers 203% of the daily RDA for vitamin A.** Broccoli and other vegetables are also high in vitamin A, but you would have to eat almost nine broccoli spears to equal the vitamin A in one carrot. Don’t over do it, though. More than three carrots a day will saturate the body’s ability to store vitamin A over a short time and can show up as an orange tint on the skin.

Because many elderly may have difficulty chewing, it’s recommended to microwave or lightly steam vegetables to soften them while minimizing the loss of nutrients. Use as little water as possible when

cooking. Other beta-carotene/vitamin A powerhouses include sweet potatoes, cantaloupe melons, mangoes and apricots.

4. Eggs—including the yolk, no joke

Eggs are a superior source of protein, containing all the essential amino acids needed by the human body. 12.5% of the weight of the egg is protein. On the evaluation scale most commonly used for assessing protein, egg is at the highest point, 100, and is used as the reference standard against which all other foods are assessed.

Eggs contain most of the vitamins—except vitamin C—and minerals that the human body requires for health. In particular, eggs are an excellent source of iodine (essential for the thyroid), phosphorus and calcium (required for bone health) and zinc (needed for wound healing and fighting infection).

Although eggs contain cholesterol, eating eggs in moderation won’t adversely affect the blood cholesterol level of most people. Cholesterol levels are far more influenced by how much saturated and trans fat you eat than dietary cholesterol.

“Everyone can enjoy eggs in moderation (around 3-4 eggs a week) in the context of a heart-friendly diet.”

—Dietitian Nicole Senior, *Heart Food and Eat to Beat Cholesterol*

Egg yolks also contain lecithin (phospholipid) which is a natural emulsifier and may reduce cholesterol absorption. You can also find eggs that have been fortified with DHA (omega-3).

To keep eggs healthy for the heart, prepare them using non-oily methods of cooking, such as hard- or soft-boiling or poaching. If you prefer fried or scrambled eggs, use olive oil or an olive-oil based spread or cooking spray instead of butter or trans-fatty margarine.

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7 super foods (continued):

5. Flax seeds

Flax seeds contain high levels of lignans and omega-3 fatty acids. Lignans may benefit the heart and possess anti-cancer properties. Laboratory studies found reduced growth in specific types of tumors. Flax may also lessen the severity of diabetes by stabilizing blood-sugar levels. Flax seed is also useful as a natural laxative due to its high, soluble (non-gassy) dietary fiber content.

You can include flax seed in home cooking by sprinkling flax seed on cereal and salads. Flax seed mixture can even be substituted for eggs in home baking such as muffins and pancakes. (1 tbsp milled flax seed, plus 3 tbsp water = 1 egg. However, final products will be less fluffy.)

A word of caution: because of their high fiber content, flax seeds and other foods with laxative properties may interfere with the absorption of some medications, so be sure to check with your doctor before including them in your diet. Also, women undergoing treatment for a cancer that is estrogen-mediating, like breast cancer, should avoid flax, soy or other foods rich in phytoestrogens.



6. Blueberries

Packed with antioxidants, brain-boosting B6, B12, folic acid and phytoflavonoids, blueberries are also high in potassium and vitamin C, making them the top choice of doctors and nutritionists. Not only can they lower your risk of heart disease and cancer, they are also anti-inflammatory. Frozen blueberries are just as good as fresh.

“Inflammation is a key driver of all chronic diseases, so blueberries have a host of benefits. I tell everyone to have a serving (about 1/2 cup) every day.”

—Ann Kulze, MD, Charleston, S.C.

7. Dark chocolate or hot cocoa

New research has shown that dark chocolate is packed with antioxidants. Nutritionists recommend 60% or higher cocoa content; the darker, the better. The darker it is, the lower the fat and sugar content.

Cocoa can also help prevent osteoporosis, especially as a way to include skim milk (rich in calcium and vitamin D) into the diet. After age 50, 1,200 milligrams of calcium daily are recommended to help prevent osteoporosis. One cup of milk provides 300 milligrams. Mounting evidence suggests that low levels of vitamin D increase death risk for older people. A 2008 study found that **death rates from any illness, especially cardiovascular disease, were higher in people with low vitamin D.**

Cornell University food scientists report that cocoa teems with antioxidants that can lower cholesterol and help prevent cancer. When they compared the anti-cancer activity of cocoa to green tea and red wine-beverages known to contain antioxidants, they found that **cocoa has nearly twice the antioxidants of red wine and up to three times those found in green tea.**

Hot cocoa is better than cold. When cocoa is heated, more antioxidants are released.

Playing a part in a healthy diet

As people age, they might need less energy—but they still need just as many of the nutrients in food. As a general guideline, seniors especially should enjoy a variety of healthy foods, avoid foods with lots of calories but few nutrients and pick foods that are low in cholesterol and fat—especially trans fats and saturated fats.

Strokes and mini-strokes (continued):



Amaurosis Fugax is a specific type of TIA where there is a sudden but temporary loss of vision in one eye. It occurs when debris (such as a blood clot) from the main artery on one side of the neck blocks one of the arteries to the retina of the corresponding eye.

TIA's are often warning signs of a future stroke. **Ten percent of people with TIAs will have a major stroke within three months.** The silver lining is that a TIA may help the patient's doctor find the cause and prevent a major stroke from causing permanent brain damage or death.

Recently, the **clot-busting drug t-PA** has become **available as an emergency treatment** that can improve the outcome from stroke. Even in serious strokes, immediate t-PA therapy can improve mental and motor function in patients years after the event.

See the signs. Act in time.

Often the symptoms of a stroke or TIA are so subtle and fleeting, the person having it doesn't notice or tell anyone about it. That's why it's essential for families and caregivers to stay aware and watchful of the warning signs.

Symptoms of a stroke or TIA

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding words
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes, often described as a Sudden trouble with walking, balance or coordination
- Dizziness

- Sudden loss of memory
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause
- Sudden, unexplainable fall
- Loss of consciousness
- Nausea or vomiting

Not all the warning signs occur in every stroke. Don't ignore signs of stroke, even if they go away! Paying attention to these warning signs is especially important in persons with risk factors such as:

- Family history of stroke
- Age: 45+ (highest risk 60-80 years of age)
- Atrial fibrillation (an irregular heart rhythm)
- Smoking
- High blood pressure

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**Suspect someone is having a stroke?
Think F.A.S.T.**

Face— Weakness on one side of the face?

- Ask the person to smile.

Arm— Weakness or numbness in one arm?

- Ask the person to raise both arms.

Speech— Slurred speech or trouble getting the words out?

- Ask the person to speak a simple sentence.

Time— Note the time signals first observed and **CALL 9-1-1.**

(From the American National Red Cross.)

Strokes and mini-strokes (continued):

- Excessive alcohol use
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Certain medical conditions including:
 - > Diabetes
 - > Heart disease
 - > Sleep apnea

What should a bystander do?

If you believe someone is having a stroke—if he or she suddenly loses the ability to speak, or move an arm or leg on one side, or experiences facial paralysis on one side:

- **Call 911 immediately** and tell them you suspect a stroke is occurring. Do not attempt to drive the person or yourself. An ambulance with advanced life support equipment is essential.
- **Check the time.** When did the first warning sign or symptom start? You'll be asked this important question later.
- **Expect the person to protest.** Denial is common. Don't take “no” for an answer. Insist on taking immediate action.

Act quickly!

If stroke symptoms persist, there is a narrow window of time to intervene. There may be **only one to three hours from the onset of symptoms in which to administer the drugs that could prevent a permanent neurological deficit.** In that time, the patient needs to be examined, blood tests need to be drawn, a CT scan of the head needs to be performed to insure that a hemorrhagic stroke is not the cause, and neurologists need to be contacted.

Be prepared!

Keep a list of emergency rescue service numbers next to the telephone and in your pocket, wallet or purse. Note: not all hospitals stock the t-PA drug that can treat a stroke. (Currently only about 250 hospitals across America do.) Therefore you should

find out which area hospitals are primary stroke centers with 24-hour emergency stroke care.

Know (in advance) which hospital or medical facility is nearest your home or office and your loved one's home. To find the closest stroke center, visit <http://www.stroke.org>.

For stroke information, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE or visit their Web site at <http://www.strokeassociation.org/>.

Senior care news

Tilapia Not the Healthy Fish Once Assumed

Surprising new research (July 8th, 2008) finds that tilapia fish is potentially dangerous to eat. Researchers from Wake Forest University School of Medicine warn that **farm-raised tilapia has very low levels of beneficial omega-3 fatty acids and, perhaps worse, very high levels of omega-6 fatty acids.** The scientists say the combination could be a potentially dangerous food source for some patients, mostly seniors, with heart disease, arthritis, asthma and other allergic and auto-immune diseases that are particularly vulnerable to an “exaggerated inflammatory response.” Omega-6 oils can also increase chances of memory problems, as found in a 2007 study of older people.

Aerobic Exercise Can Boost the Aging Mind as Well as Body, Says Research

Aerobic exercise could give older adults a boost in brainpower, according to a recent review of studies from the Netherlands. Aerobic exercise helps boost cognitive processing speed, motor function and visual and auditory attention in healthy older people.