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BY JULIE DEARDORFF
Chicago Tribune

HERE ARE 10 HEALTHFUL FOODS YOU SHOULD INCORPORATE INTO YOUR DIET NOW

Step aside, blueberries, spinach and broccoli. It's time to give unsung super foods a chance. Many of us tend to eat what we know and what we can pronounce and prepare. But mixing things up helps add more healthful micronutrients and phytochemicals into our diets, said Mary Russell, director of nutrition services at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

To help steer your cart in a new direction, try incorporating these 10 healthful foods that you probably aren't eating -- but should be -- into your diet.

Kamut

An ancient relative of durum wheat, kamut increasingly is used as an alternative to regular wheat. It has 20 to 40 percent more protein and is higher in lipids, amino acids, vitamins and minerals. Moreover, it can be tolerated by some with sensitivities to regular wheat. Kamut can be found in some packaged pastas, bread, cereals and crackers.

Try it: Kamut is usually found in the bulk section of supermarkets. Substitute it for wheat berries or rice or mix with sauteed peppers and onions. For breakfast, mix a half-cup with diced apples, raisins, walnuts and a touch of cinnamon and honey.

Dandelion greens

One of the first vegetables to come to the farmers market -- and your yard -- in the spring, dandelion greens are low in calories and high in fiber. But a serving (1 cup) of these dark, leafy greens also has more vitamin A than a cup of cantaloupe and more calcium than spinach, said dietitian Jodi Greebel, president of Citrition, a nutritional counseling practice in New York City. They're also high in iron, other vitamins (including vitamin C), potassium and folate.

Try them: They're somewhat bitter so you might not want to toss them in salads. Instead, try cooking them with something sweet -- say a chicken or pasta dish with tomatoes -- or adding nuts and dried fruit, Greebel said. Or saute with garlic and pepper.

Grapefruit

Grapefruit is in peak season through April and its juice boasts more nutrients per calorie than 100 percent apple, grape, pineapple and prune juice. Each serving (1 cup of juice) gives you more than 100 percent of your daily recommended vitamin C, which helps neutralize free radicals that can damage cells and lead to infection, aging and disease. It can boost the performance of some medications -- but it can interfere with others -- so check with your doctor if you take prescription drugs.

Try them: Top with a spoonful of maple syrup, or a dash of cinnamon, nutmeg or cloves, or use as a topping on cereal, waffles, pancakes or in a yogurt parfait.

Tempeh

Made from fermented soybeans, this traditional Indonesian food looks strange but it may ease symptoms of menopause because it contains phytochemicals such as isoflavones and saponins, said Russell. The soy protein and isoflavones also might reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers.

Try it: Slice and saute. Its nutty, mushroom flavor can be used in soups, salads and sandwiches, according to author Jonny Bowden in "The 150 Healthiest Foods on Earth."

Seaweed

Sea vegetables are rich in vitamins, minerals and trace elements. The kelp family (kombu, wakame and arame) is an excellent source of iodine and has about four times the iron of beef. Arame has more than 10 times the calcium as milk. Nori, the seaweed wrapped around sushi rolls, contains protein, calcium, iron, potassium and more vitamin A than carrots. If you're taking medications, check with your doctor.

Try it: Try sushi or maki rolls. Or cut nori strips into pieces and sprinkle on salads, Russell suggested. Put kelp in a shaker and use instead of salt. Add to soups. Or mix it with olive oil or tamari and use as a seasoning.

Avocados

Don't shun this creamy fruit because of the fat content. Avocados have good, unsaturated fats which help with growth and development of the central nervous system and the brain. They're packed with nearly 20 vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. And they play well with others; when you eat an avocado, it helps the body absorb more fat-soluble nutrients, such as alpha- and beta-carotene, as well as lutein, from other foods.

Try them: Use avocado in place of mayonnaise. Add it to smoothies, salad, salsa, soups or sandwiches.

Prunes

These little gems are "a mouthful of rich sweetness," said dietitian and nutrition therapist Victoria Shanta Retelny of Chicago. High in antioxidants, they also have twice as much potassium as bananas; potassium can help keep blood pressure in check.

Try them: Retelny loves to dip them in dark chocolate or she purees them, then tops them with a dollop of plain yogurt and cinnamon.

Chia seeds

The little seeds that blossom into low maintenance pets -- or the bizarre new Chia Obama -- are actually nutrient-dense whole grains with omega-3 fatty acids. "They have among the highest antioxidant activity of any whole food, outdistancing even fresh blueberries," doctors Michael Roizen and Mehmet Oz wrote in "You: Staying Young." Studies also have shown they can level out blood sugar spikes. Roizen and Oz recommend two daily doses of about 20 grams of seeds each.

Try them: Use like flax seeds. "Sprinkle chia seeds in oatmeal or cereal for breakfast, or add them to salads, smoothies or baked goods such as muffins or brownies," said natural health expert Jordan Rubin.

Beets

The deep red color can be a little intimidating, but earthy beets give us fiber, iron and vitamin C. "Plus, they contain betacyanin, a powerful cancer-fighting agent that has been shown to help prevent colon cancer," said dietitian Gloria Tsang, founder of the online nutrition community Healthcastle.com. They also contain antioxidants that have been shown to lower total cholesterol while increasing HDL (good) cholesterol.

Try them: Try marinating steamed beets in fresh lemon juice, olive oil and fresh herbs. Grate raw beets onto salads, soups or any other dish. Or simply roast them with other veggies, Tsang suggested. But don't cook beets too long, because their anti-cancer activity is diminished by heat.

Pumpkin

Though fresh pumpkin is available only in the fall and winter, canned products are just as healthful, Tsang said. "A serving of pumpkin (1 cup) has nearly 3 grams of fiber, and is packed with beta carotene -- an antioxidant that can help improve immune function and reduce the risk for cancer and heart disease," she said.

Try it: Cut fresh peeled pumpkin into chunks and roast with a bit of olive oil, salt and pepper, Tsang suggests. Or drop a generous scoop of canned pumpkin into plain pancake batter, or make a soup from canned pumpkin, chicken broth and fat-free half-and-half.

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