

4 Must-Grab Foods for a Summer of Weight Loss

Summer is right around the corner, a time to shed the cold-weather layers, step into the sunshine and enjoy cookouts, pool parties and beach vacations!

And given that we'll be out of the A/C and in the heat for these fun festivities, it's also a time that inspires many people to hit the gym more consistently so they can don their tank tops, shorts and swimsuits with confidence.

As you probably know, exercise alone will not yield the summer-ready results you're looking for; a healthy diet paired with exercise is essential for not only successful weight loss, but also for achieving any health-related goal. In this article, I'm going to highlight four in-season foods that can help you look and feel fantastic this summer!

Blueberries

I consider blueberries a fat-fighting fruit because they are low in calories and sugar, high in fiber, and terrific for the digestive system. A one-cup serving of raw blueberries contains just 84 calories, 0.5 grams of fat, 1.1 grams of protein, and 21.4 grams of carbohydrates, including 3.6 grams of fiber.

The fiber in blueberries, which is not quickly absorbed by our bodies, increases our metabolism and helps us feel fuller longer. Because the body converts excess sugar into fat, the relatively low sugar content of blueberries make them an excellent fruit for weight loss as well. And finally, blueberries possess a substance called tannin, which functions as a natural astringent within the digestive system and helps reduce inflammation within the digestive tract. An efficiently working digestive system optimally processes, utilizes and

disposes of food.

Blueberries are also a favorite fruit of mine because they're a nutritional powerhouse! They contain a variety of vitamins, including A, E, B-6, B-12, 36 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin K, and 24 percent of the recommended amount of vitamin C. The antioxidants of blueberries help prevent the production of free radicals that impair the body's cells and can lead to disease.

Blueberries make great toppings for just about anything, from cereal, yogurt, and oatmeal in the morning to smoothies and salads in the afternoon.

Watermelon

If blueberries don't tickle you pink, perhaps watermelon will! Watermelon is a wonderfully refreshing summertime staple that is also figure-friendly due to its low calories and high water content. (Watermelons are 92 percent water.) One cup of watermelon balls contains just 46 calories.

Arginine, an amino acid abundant in watermelon, might promote weight loss. For a study, researchers supplemented the diets of obese mice with arginine for three months and discovered that doing so decreased body fat gains by an impressive 64 percent. Adding arginine also enhanced the oxidation of fat and glucose and increased lean muscle; the more lean muscle you have, the more active your metabolism is in helping you burn body fat.

Besides its sweet flavor and hydrating power, watermelon is also a refreshing treat because of something called citrulline. Citrulline, which can be found in the white portion and the rind of the watermelon, is an amino acid that decreases muscle fatigue by helping blood vessels relax. Chop the rind into small chunks and mix it with onions, green peppers, jalapeno peppers, vinegar, lemon juice and seasoning to make a healthy and energizing watermelon rind salsa.

Watermelon is also rich in vitamin A, which does fabulous things like protect us from cancer, cataracts and atherosclerosis, as well as keep our skin, eyes and bones healthy. Watermelon's sizable supply of vitamin C protects our bodies from infection, maintains healthy bones and teeth, quickens the body's ability to repair wounds and lowers blood pressure.

Chili Peppers

Hot peppers such as jalapeños, habaneros and serranos are major metabolism-boosters due to a fiery little chemical called capsaicin, which increases the fat-burning rate in the body and is also responsible for giving salsa, barbeque sauces and chili their kick.

A Korean study found that capsaicin works to lessen the effects of dietary fat, up-regulating some genes and down-regulating others to buffer the fats. They researchers said that "capsaicin can have a significant inhibitory effect against fat accumulation."

A study conducted by the University of Maryland Medical Center concluded that capsaicin can control carbohydrate breakdown for more efficient calorie consumption and energy production. Capsaicin has also been shown to curb appetite, relieve the burning from nerve pain (ironically enough) and even disrupt the mitochondria of cancer cells while leaving other cells untouched.

Chili peppers can be easily incorporated into myriad recipes, including those for chilled soups like gazpacho, guacamole, chili or salsa. I should add, however, that one should use caution when consuming peppers; while they are perfectly tolerated by many, for others they aggravate the lips, mouth and digestive system. And try not to get pepper juice in your eye!

Zucchini

If hot peppers aren't *cool* with you, then I recommend you try warming up to zucchini instead! Zucchini makes an excellent summertime weight-loss food because it is exceptionally low in calories, especially in comparison to its size; one large zucchini has only 54 calories!

It's old news that taking in less calories than you expend is key to weight loss, so the fact that zucchini, a water-rich vegetable, can be eaten in large quantities without jeopardizing your daily calorie count makes it a go-to for summer grilling.

Zucchini is also diet friendly because they are easy to prepare and don't require added ingredients such as sugar or excessive fats to make them taste great. Brush zucchini slices with olive oil and sprinkle with your favorite spices, then put them on the grill until they are nice and crisp. Alternatively, you can toss zucchini in light, whipped, trans-fat-free butter (a little butter won't hurt you!), oregano, a little parmesan cheese if you prefer, and bake it at 350 degrees for 35-40 minutes, and voilà! You've got a delicious, satiating side dish. Be sure not to peel the skin; that's where most of the nutrients are!

In addition to its weight loss-promoting benefits, zucchini also boasts a host of other health-enhancing properties. A one-cup serving of zucchini contains 30 percent of the daily recommended intake of vitamin C for women, 25 percent for a man, 12 percent and 9.5 percent of the daily recommended intake of manganese for men and women, respectively. A diet lacking in manganese may put you at a higher risk for arthritis, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Zucchini is also rich in vitamins B-6 and K, the latter of which contributes to the growth, development and maintenance of bones.

While the four foods mentioned above are wonderful waist-whittlers, it's important to keep in mind that *all* of the fruits and veggies God created for us are healthy and helpful

for weight loss. Load up this summer on items that appeal to you personally, be it beets, blackberries, tomatoes or tangerines. These are all low in calories and full of flavor, a potent combination when it comes to looking great and feeling even better!

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