

## 15 'Superfoods' Under \$1 a Serving

Source: *MSN Lifestyle*



### **CHEAP, NUTRITIOUS, AND TASTY**

Eating healthy and staying within a food budget can be challenging. Salads and smoothies generally are more expensive than pizza and burgers, and so-called "superfoods" such as quinoa and goji berries have eye-popping prices. As daunting as it may seem to incorporate such fare into your diet, many foods credited with health benefits are widely available at affordable prices. Here are 15 "superfoods" that cost less than \$1 a nutrition-packed serving.

### **CABBAGE (15 CENTS)**

Heralded for its gastrointestinal cleansing properties since ancient Rome, this leafy cruciferous vegetable is packed with fiber and compounds that may help prevent certain types of cancer. The nutrients in cabbage, whether steamed, raw, or sautéed, are easily absorbed by the body. Cabbage is simple to store and will keep in the fridge for a few weeks in the crisper drawer. A delicious cabbage soup is a heartwarming classic in many cuisines. Cabbage typically costs about 60 cents a pound, making a 1 cup (raw) serving size just 15 cents.

### **EGGS (25 CENTS)**

The incredible, edible egg is well deserving of its marketing moniker, packed with lean protein and essential vitamins and minerals. This nutritionally well-rounded food contains significant amounts of vitamins B12 and D, which help stabilize energy levels and protect the integrity of nerve cells, among other crucial bodily functions. Eggs are as versatile as they are healthful. Keep a few hard-boiled eggs on hand for an on-the-go snack or use them to enhance a sandwich. Priced at about 25 cents each, eggs are an affordable way to optimize a diet.

### **LENTILS (25 CENTS)**

These pea-shaped legumes are in the same family as kidney beans and split peas. Rich in protein, and a host of vitamins and minerals, the main nutritional stars are fiber, folate, and magnesium, which help keep the heart healthy, digestive system happy, and blood sugar regulated. Incorporating lentils into a regular diet can help the body produce what it needs to help keep arteries clean and functioning up to snuff. A quick-and-easy lentil soup is a family favorite weeknight meal. At roughly 10 cents a dry ounce, one serving size (5 cooked ounces or 2.5 uncooked ounces) costs just 25 cents.

### **OATS (50 CENTS)**

Aside from their fiber and mineral-packed goodness, oats are the only source of a specific type of antioxidants (avenanthramides) that may help reduce the risk of heart disease. A bowl of oatmeal in the morning reduces hunger, releasing energy slowly into the bloodstream, which stabilizes sugar levels while reducing cravings. Up the nutritional ante of homemade cookies by using oats in the recipe. Rolled oats are about \$1 a pound, so a large half-cup uncooked serving is only 50 cents.

### **LEMON (15 CENTS)**

These ubiquitous citrus fruits are a powerful source of vitamin C and antioxidants, which can help the body's vital organs stay in tip-top shape. A squeeze of lemon in a glass of water or tea, or over salads and grilled meats, is an easy way to work this powerful fruit into a daily routine. Lemons cost an average of 30 cents apiece, so one serving, equal to half a lemon, is about 15 cents.

### **GREEN TEA (15 CENTS)**

This powerful beverage isn't just a less acidic alternative to a morning cup of joe; it packs a powerful punch of impressive health benefits. The beneficial side effects of green tea include improved brain function and increased weight loss when dieting. The antioxidants in green tea are thought to help eliminate the presence of free radicals that can cause disease. Aside from enjoying a cup each morning or afternoon, use green tea to flavor homemade ice cream and baked goods, making those calories a little less empty. On average, each green tea bag costs just 15 cents.

### **CARROTS (35 CENTS)**

These sweet, crunchy, and multi-colored root vegetables have a lot to offer besides improved eye health. Carrots also contain a lot of potassium and vitamin K, both of which help keep the blood clean and stabilize pressure. Substitute carrots for chips or crackers with a favorite dip, or indulge in carrot cake when a sweet craving arises. One serving of carrots, about 1 cup, costs about 35 cents.

### **SWEET POTATO (60 CENTS)**

A truly guilt-free indulgence, sweet potatoes are one of the healthiest starches to include in a balanced diet. Sweet potatoes contain plenty of fiber and energy-dense carbohydrates, but the heavy hitters on the nutritional scale come from the laundry list of vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A, C, B5, B6, and E, plus manganese and potassium. The natural sweetness is also an excellent way to satisfy a sweet tooth without relying on processed sugars and syrups, especially in an all-time favorite sweet potato pie. A medium to large sweet potato costs about 60 cents.

### **BLACK BEANS (25 CENTS)**

All beans are nutritional powerhouses and a highly recommended part of a balanced diet, but black beans are especially versatile. One of the major functions of black beans is the way it helps keep the body's gastrointestinal tract -- the colon in particular -- squeaky clean. The indigestible elements of black beans attract bacteria that live in the colon, which in turn get passed out uneventfully. Replacing meat with black beans in classic Mexican recipes for tacos, enchiladas, and salads is a great way to get your fill, or try out a less conventional method by incorporating them into brownies. A hefty 1 cup serving of black beans costs about 25 cents.

### **BANANAS (25 CENTS)**

The health benefits of bananas are many, including quick hangover relief (attributable to their high potassium content). These starchy, sweet fruits also curb the appetite and provide long-lasting energy, which is perfect for athletes and dieters. Keeping a couple of bananas on hand for an easy grab-and-go snack is always a good idea. When there are too many getting too ripe, whip up a healthy dessert featuring bananas. The average banana costs 25 cents.

### **FLAXSEED (30 CENTS)**

Although incorporating these flaxseed into a diet can seem odd at first, there are actually many culinary applications. A tablespoon of ground flaxseed mixed with 3 tablespoons of water works just like an egg in baking. The seeds are a delicious addition to granola and breads, and make a nutty topping for salad and yogurt when toasted in a dry pan. Flaxseed's amino-acid profile is especially valuable for people who don't eat meat. This culinary upgrade also comes with protein as potent as soybeans, a healthy dose of (good) fat, and plenty of fiber to keep everything smooth in the GI department. One large serving -- 3 tablespoons of whole seeds -- costs about 30 cents.

### **DRIED SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS (86 CENTS)**

Mushrooms, and particularly shiitakes, have long been praised in Chinese medicine, and modern science supports many of those 6,000-year-old claims. Particularly important for those who consume little to no meat, they are rich in bioavailable iron. On their long list of health benefits, supporting the cardiovascular and immune systems ranks high. Throw a few caps into broth, stew, or sauce for extra flavor and richness. They also make a great filling for tacos or topping for ramen once rehydrated. A 1.5-ounce jar costs roughly \$7 and yields about eight servings of three to four caps each, or about 86 cents a serving.

### **FROZEN BLUEBERRIES (74 CENTS)**

Every bit as antioxidant-packed as fresh blueberries, frozen blueberries are a more convenient, accessible, and inexpensive way to include this superfood in a diet. Blended into a smoothie, or nestled into homemade pancakes, these tasty fruits are loaded with healthy compounds. Among the most exciting benefits of blueberries is improved memory function, plus a host of vitamins and fiber. Frozen, they go for roughly 30 cents an ounce; a generous serving of 2.5 ounces adds up to 75 cents.

### **TURMERIC (20 CENTS)**

The actively beneficial element in turmeric is curcumin, which isn't easily absorbed by the body. It becomes more easily taken in when consumed along with natural fats and black pepper. Some benefits associated with curcumin include improved brain function, lower risk of cancer, and anti-inflammatory properties. Using a teaspoon in soups, marinades, and sauces adds color, as well as a subtle flavor. Each teaspoon-size serving costs about 20 cents.

### **GARLIC (33 CENTS)**

Immune booster extraordinaire, garlic is also one of the most loved flavor enhancers in cuisines worldwide. From helping to lower blood pressure and fighting the common cold and flu to possible protection against Alzheimer's disease and dementia, there are plenty of reasons to keep garlic as a staple in the kitchen. At an average of \$1 a head, each hefty serving of a few large cloves costs about 33 cents. Use this pungent ingredient in any savory dish, make it the star of the show with a roasted garlic soup, or simply rub it on toast for a delicious dose of nutrition.