



## **SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Affiliated with  
National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World  
and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

### **Superfoods**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Participants will define superfood, describing the main characteristics and issues related to them.
2. Participants will describe the key components of healthy “super” diet.
3. Participants will prepare and taste a snack using some superfoods.

#### **Advance Preparation:**

Purchase ingredients and gather supplies to prepare fruit and yogurt parfaits. Print copies of the Superfoods Handout.

#### **Introduction:**

**Ask:** Has anyone heard about superfoods? What is a superfood?

#### **Say:**

The news media is filled with stories of foods that are “more powerful than drugs” to help to fight cancer, ward off heart disease, control diabetes, and alter your mood.

Superfood is a term sometimes used to describe food with high phytonutrient content that some may believe confers health benefits as a result. For example, blueberries are often considered a superfood because they contain significant amounts of antioxidants, anthocyanins, Vitamin C, manganese, and dietary fiber.

In July, 2008, Wikipedia listed more than 40 items ranging from dark chocolate to rosemary leaf as “alleged superfoods.” Articles in the popular press, broadcast media, the Internet, and marketing materials have been promoting the superfoods concept, often with a mixture of research-based information and hype.

The International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation's 2007 Food & Health Survey reported that two-thirds of Americans are making changes to improve the healthfulness of their diet. The majority of Americans report consuming foods and food components for bone health, cardiovascular disease prevention, and cancer prevention. Certain foods or food components were frequently cited as having health benefits, including: fruits and vegetables, fish, fish oil, seafood, milk and dairy foods, whole grains, fiber, oatmeal/oat bran and green tea.

These are the foods that are most often listed as being superfoods.

Beans

Blueberries

Broccoli

Oats  
 Oranges  
 Pumpkin  
 Salmon  
 Soy  
 Spinach  
 Tea (green or black)  
 Tomatoes  
 Turkey  
 Walnuts  
 Yogurt

These superfoods are *nutrient dense*, and can be a part of a healthy diet. Nutrient density is a measure of the nutrients provided per calorie of food, or the ratio of nutrients to calories (energy). Foods that supply generous amounts of one or more nutrients compared to the number of calories they supply are called nutrient dense. Eggs, for example, have a high nutrient density, because they provide protein and many vitamins and minerals in proportion their calories. (Please see HGIC leaflet 4062 “Nutrient density” for more information).

Foods that appear on superfoods lists often contain antioxidants. Antioxidants can protect your body’s cells from damaging oxidation much like oil or paint protects your car from rust. (Please see HGIC leaflet 4064 “Antioxidants” for more information).

### **Superfoods versus Superdiet**

As consumers learn about the health benefits of so-called superfoods, confusion and controversy arise over ambiguous issues for which research-based answers are unavailable or incomplete. Examples of these issues are:

- Regulators have not found an appropriate labeling system to help consumers distinguish between foods that are nutrient rich because nutrients or beneficial components have been added during processing (such as highly processed and enriched/fortified energy bars) and foods that are naturally nutrient rich (such as whole grains).
- Some foods that are touted to have superior nutritional properties are high in added sugars, saturated fat or sodium (e.g., sweetened herbal smoothies).
- Some foods that are promoted to be nutritionally superior contain nutrients or beneficial food components with low bioavailability.

### **Distribute:**

Superfoods handout.



## Say:

The concept of superfoods has captured the interest of consumers. However, it is more important to eat a “super diet” than to concentrate on individual foods as the key to good health. A super diet is one that follows the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* on a daily basis. Rather than focusing on a single disease or food component, the Dietary Guidelines provide science-based advice to promote health and reduce overall risk for major chronic diseases through diet and physical activity.

Rather than emphasizing individual foods as keys to good health, the total diet or overall pattern of food eaten is the most important focus of a healthful eating style.

## Food Preparation:

Prepare the fruit and yogurt parfaits and distribute the recipe.

## Resources/References:

1. Wikipedia contributors. Superfood. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. October 17, 2007, 19:50 UTC. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Superfood&oldid=165249473>. Accessed October 24, 2007.
2. International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation and Institute of Food Technologists (IFT). *Guidelines for communicating the emerging science of dietary components for health*. 2005. Available at: <http://www.ific.org/nutrition/functional/guidelines>. Accessed October 24, 2007.
3. International Food Information Council. *Consumer attitudes toward functional foods/food for health*. Available at: <http://www.ific.org/research/funcfoodsres07.cfm>. Accessed October 24, 2007.
4. Practice paper of the American Dietetic Association: Nutrient density: Meeting nutrient goals within calorie needs. *J Amer Diet Assoc*. 2007;107:860-869.
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