

These 12 foods should make up a large part of your diet.

The more of these foods you eat, the better your body will be able to increase lean muscle mass and avoid storing fat. Though you can base entire meals and snacks around these foods, you don't have to. But do follow these guidelines.

Incorporate two or three of these foods into each of your three major meals and at least one of them into each of your three snacks.

Diversify your food at every meal to get a combination of protein, carbohydrates, and fat.

Make sure you sneak a little bit of protein into each snack.

My Top 12

-Almonds and other nuts

-Beans and legumes

-Spinach and other green vegetables

-Dairy – *Almond Milk (fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese)

-Old fashion oatmeal (unsweetened, unflavored)

-Eggs

-Turkey and other lean meats

-Peanut butter

-Olive oil

-100% Whole-grain breads and cereals

-Extra-protein (whey) powder

-Blueberries, Raspberries and other berries

#1: Almonds and Other Nuts

Superpowers: build muscle, fight cravings

Secret weapons: protein, monounsaturated fats, vitamin E, fiber, magnesium, folate (peanuts), phosphorus

Fight against: obesity, heart disease, muscle loss, wrinkles, cancer, high blood pressure

Sidekicks: pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, avocados

Imposters: salted or smoked nuts

#2: Beans and Legumes

Superpowers: build muscle, help burn fat, regulate digestion

Secret weapons: fiber, protein, iron, folate

Fight against: obesity, colon cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure

Sidekicks: lentils, peas, bean dips, hummus, edamame

Imposters: refried beans, which are high in saturated fats; baked beans, which are high in sugar

#3: Spinach and Other Green Vegetables

Superpowers: neutralize free radicals, which are molecules that accelerate the aging process

Secret weapons: vitamins including A, C, and K; folate; minerals including calcium and magnesium; fiber; beta-carotene

Fight against: cancer, heart disease, stroke, obesity, osteoporosis

Sidekicks: cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and brussels sprouts; green, yellow, red, and orange vegetables like asparagus, peppers, and yellow beans

Imposters: none, as long as you don't fry them or smother them in fatty cheeses

#4: Dairy *Almond Milk (Fat-Free or Low-Fat Milk, Yogurt, Cheese, and Cottage Cheese)

Superpowers: builds strong bones, fires up weight loss

Secret weapons: calcium, vitamins A and B12, riboflavin, phosphorus, potassium

Fights against: osteoporosis, obesity, high blood pressure, cancer **Sidekicks:** none

Imposters: whole milk, frozen yogurt

#5: Instant Oatmeal (Unsweetened, Unflavored)

Superpowers: boosts energy and sex drive, reduces cholesterol, maintains blood sugar levels

Secret weapons: complex carbohydrates and fiber

Fights against: heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, obesity

Sidekicks: high-fiber cereals such as All-Bran and Fiber One

Imposters: cereals with added sugar and high-fructose corn syrup

#6: Eggs

Superpowers: build muscle, burn fat

Secret weapons: protein, vitamin B12, vitamin A

Fight against: obesity

Sidekicks: none

Imposters: none

7: Turkey and Other Lean Meats (Lean Steak, Chicken, and Fish)

Superpowers: build muscle, improve the immune system

Secret weapons: protein, iron, zinc, creatine (beef), omega-3 fatty acids (fish), vitamins B6 (chicken and fish) and B12, phosphorus, potassium

Fight against: obesity, various diseases

Sidekicks: shellfish, Canadian bacon

Imposters: sausage, bacon, cured meats, ham, fatty cuts of steak such as T-bone and rib eye

#8: Peanut Butter (All-Natural, Sugar-Free)

Superpowers: boosts testosterone, builds muscle, burns fat

Secret weapons: protein, monounsaturated fat, vitamin E, niacin, magnesium

Fights against: obesity, muscle loss, wrinkles, cardiovascular disease

Sidekicks: cashew and almond butters

Imposters: mass-produced sugary and trans fatty peanut butters

#9: Olive Oil

Superpowers: lowers cholesterol, boosts the immune system

Secret weapons: monounsaturated fat, vitamin E

Fights against: obesity, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure

Sidekicks: canola oil, peanut oil, sesame oil

Imposters: vegetable and hydrogenated vegetable oils, trans fatty acids, margarine

#10: Whole-Grain Breads and Cereals

Superpower: prevent your body from storing fat

Secret weapons: fiber, protein, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, pyridoxine, vitamin E, magnesium, zinc, potassium, iron, calcium

Fight against: obesity, cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease

Sidekicks: brown rice, whole-wheat pretzels, whole-wheat pastas

Imposters: processed bakery products such as white bread, bagels, and doughnuts; breads labeled wheat instead of whole wheat

#11: Extra-Protein (Whey) Powder

Superpowers: builds muscle, burns fat

Secret weapons: protein, cysteine, glutathione

Fights against: obesity

Sidekick: ricotta cheese

Imposter: soy protein

#12: Blueberries, Raspberries and Other Berries

Superpowers: protect your heart; enhance eyesight; improve balance, coordination, and short-term memory; prevent cravings

Secret weapons: antioxidants, fiber, vitamin C, tannins (cranberries)

Fight against: heart disease, cancer, obesity

Sidekicks: most other fruits, especially apples and grapefruit

Imposters: jellies, most of which eliminate fiber and add sugar