



POWER COUPLES

Superfoods are great on their own.
But if you want to fully reap
their nutritional benefits, try pairing
them with other superfoods.
SASHA GONZALES finds out why these
healthy picks are better together.

PHOTOGRAPHY WONG WEI LIANG

FISH + WINE

All fish is good for you, but oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and tuna are especially healthy as they contain omega-3 fatty acids.

These deliver a host of benefits, including maintaining cardiovascular health by reducing plaque build-up in the arteries, lowering bad cholesterol while elevating good cholesterol levels, improving joint health by reducing joint tenderness and stiffness, enhancing the health of your skin, and even minimising the risk of cancer.

To boost your uptake when eating oily fish, Pooja Vig, nutritionist and co-founder at The Nutrition Clinic, suggests sipping on a glass of red wine. "The wine helps soak up the healthy omega-3 fats found in the fish," she explains. "One glass has enough heart-healthy polyphenol antioxidants for improved omega-3 absorption." If you find wine too strong to drink, Pooja recommends marinating a piece of fish in a small amount of wine before cooking it.

RASPBERRIES + APPLES

Rich in fibre and vitamins, apples have long been considered an anti-cancer food. But if you want to boost their cancer-preventive effects, serve them with raspberries. These contain an antioxidant called ellagic acid. According to a 2005 University of Florida study in the US, it enhances the cancer-killing powers of quercetin, an antioxidant found in apples.

Both raspberries and apples contain the biggest amount of ellagic acid and quercetin, respectively. You can temper tartness by mixing them into a green salad.

ALMONDS + STRAWBERRIES

Macular degeneration is a major cause of blindness. An irreversible, age-related condition, it is caused by damage to the macula, or central part of the retina. Vitamin E, found in many foods, including almonds, has been shown to help prevent cataracts and macular degeneration.

To help turn this nutrient into a form your body can utilise better, team almonds with strawberries, recommends Pooja. The vitamin C in the fruit helps vitamin E restore itself to a more active form your body can use. To enjoy this powerful duo, sprinkle a bowl of cut strawberries with chopped almonds or add them to your muffin batter.

ONIONS + CHICKPEAS

Chickpeas – also known as garbanzo beans – contain good amounts of zinc, which is needed for cell reproduction, tissue growth and repair. It is also a good source of iron, which helps transport oxygen around the body and is essential for blood production.

Your body is better able to absorb the zinc in chickpeas when sulphur compounds are present. Onions are rich in these compounds, particularly cysteine and methionine. "The cysteine-rich intestinal protein found in onions helps to bind the zinc during transportation through the body's mucous membranes," says Jaclyn Reutens, clinical dietitian with Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants.

The sulphur compounds in onion have also been shown to help the body absorb more iron from the chickpeas. To enjoy them together, try a chickpea curry. Use ground onions in the curry base, and add canned chickpeas.

GREEN TEA + LEMON JUICE

Powerful antioxidants called catechins are found in green tea. Catechins are thought to have anti-oxidative, anti-hypertensive, anti-inflammatory, and lipid-lowering effects. Green tea catechins are not very stable, however, with up to 80 per cent being destroyed during digestion.

To counteract this, Susie Rucker, nutritional therapist at Body With Soul, advises you to consume green tea to which a splash of lemon or other citrus juice has been added. The juice reduces the breakdown of catechins in our digestive system, making them more readily absorbed by the body.

Also, a 2007 study done by researchers from Purdue University in the US found that vitamin C from lemon juice interacted with the catechins to prevent their degradation in the intestines. In terms of stabilising power, following lemons were orange, lime and grapefruit juices.



RED MEAT + ROSEMARY

We are often warned against barbecuing or grilling red meat until it chars. When red meat is cooked at very high temperatures over an open flame, it is believed to trigger a reaction that results in the production of cancer-causing chemicals.

But Susie says that you can actually temper the carcinogenic effects of barbecuing and grilling by marinating the meat with rosemary before you cook it. "Rosemary not only lends a lovely aroma to the dish, it also has strong anti-cancer properties, which means it may prevent cancerous compounds from forming during the cooking process."

Indeed, a few studies, including one published in 2010 in the *Journal of Food Science*, found that cooking meat with rosemary reduces carcinogens by up to 90 per cent. Try marinating red meat, like beef and lamb, with sprigs of fresh or dried rosemary before cooking it.

CHICKEN + SWEET POTATOES

Sweet potatoes are rich in vitamin A, which you need for a number of functions in the body, including the production of new cells and maintaining vision in dim light. Zinc, a mineral found in chicken and other meats, supports vitamin A in a number of ways, says Jaclyn.

Firstly, it helps metabolise vitamin A. Secondly, it is essential in the production of a retinol-binding protein that helps transport vitamin A to all the tissues in the body. Zinc is also needed to convert retinol (a form of vitamin A) to retinal, which helps prevent night blindness. Finally, zinc is used to help with the release of vitamin A from the liver.

For a healthy and filling meal, grill or poach a portion of chicken, and serve with mashed or baked sweet potato.





TOMATOES + OLIVE OIL

Tomatoes are an excellent source of lycopene, a phytonutrient that reduces the risk of skin cancer, says Jaclyn. It also contains high levels of beta-carotene, an antioxidant that supports the immune system and helps maintain healthy skin.

Lycopene is a fat-soluble antioxidant and is best absorbed by the body when consumed with healthy fats such as olive oil. And you are best off cooking the tomatoes in olive oil as cooked tomatoes provide significantly more lycopene than raw ones.

A couple of ways to enjoy this healthy combination is to make your own pasta sauce using fresh or canned tomatoes, or grill cherry tomatoes and dress them with good-quality olive oil.

YOGURT + BANANAS

Your gut contains trillions of bacteria, both good and bad. Good intestinal bacteria are essential to overall health as they regulate digestion and prevent constipation, support your immunity, synthesise essential vitamins and hormones, as well as prevent infections and diseases.

Illness, surgery, antibiotics and even stress can kill off good bacteria and upset your intestinal flora balance. But your diet can help improve the ratio of good bacteria to bad.

Prebiotic and probiotic foods increase the activity of good bacteria in your gut, says Pooja. Yogurt contains plenty of probiotics, which are similar to the good bacteria in your intestines and can help them to multiply.

In order to grow and thrive, probiotics need prebiotics – non-digestible carbohydrates that can be found in a variety of foods, including bananas. Consumed together as part of a substantial breakfast or post-workout snack, yogurt and bananas help to enhance the growth of beneficial bacteria in your intestines and aid healthy digestion. **S**