

Super 'Shrooms

They aren't just low-calorie options rich in vitamins and minerals. These fungi could possibly protect you from certain diseases as well.

 Apart from being an excellent source of B vitamins (niacin, riboflavin and thiamin), that support the immune and nervous systems, mushrooms are also packed with the antioxidant ergothioneine that fights inflammation. Most have a similar nutritional content and are high in zinc and potassium, says Jaclyn, a clinical dietitian from Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants.

That's not all – these mighty caps may help you shed kilos, too. Researchers from Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center in the US found that by substituting lean ground beef for mushrooms, participants were able to effectively limit their calorie intake and still feel satiated.

Not only are they good for your health, mushrooms also make fabulous meat substitutes, says Dr Leslie Tay, a general practitioner on Shape's advisory board and a renowned local food blogger. They contain guanylate, which combines with glutamates to excite "umami" (savory taste) receptors, he adds. Mushrooms also add bite to any meal. Grab these on your next grocery run!

"To get the most nutrients out of mushrooms, avoid overcooking them at high heat. Otherwise, they lose much of the B vitamins." – JACLYN REUTENS, DIETITIAN

THE CRIMINI FAMILY

One of the most common varieties, criminis are as good a source of antioxidants as broccoli, carrots, green beans, and red peppers, according to a study by Pennsylvania State University in the US. Members of this family include portobello, white button and Swiss brown mushrooms. Researchers found that the white button inhibits aromatase (the enzyme that leads to the production of oestrogen), which helps prevent certain hormone-dependent cancers from recurring. An Australian lab study showed that the white button could also help lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels.

1/PORTOBELLO

This giant crimini is said to be the steak for vegetarians because of its robust flavour and meat-like texture. It's also exceptionally high in potassium - one portobello gives you the same amount found in a banana.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Classic hamburger

TRY THIS Stuff with shredded mozzarella and roasted bell pepper, and bake for a delish vegetarian patty.

2/WHITE BUTTON

Mild and earthy in flavour, it can be eaten raw in salads, or cooked in savoury dishes.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Meat pilaf

TRY THIS In place of beef or chicken. Saute diced white buttons with onions and serve with boiled barley instead of rice.

3/SWISS BROWN

More flavourful than the white button, it has the same springy bite when cooked.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Chicken-mayo sandwich

TRY THIS Stir-fry with garlic, eggplant and tomatoes, and tuck them into a wholemeal tortilla wrap. Use Greek yogurt or sour cream to reduce fat.

4/ENOKI

According to researchers at the National University of Singapore, the enoki's stalk contains a large amount of proteins that trigger the production of cytokines (cell signalling molecules) that regulate our immune system. Its crunchiness adds character to Chinese savouries.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Seafood soup

TRY THIS Combine enoki with carrot, radish, cabbage, tofu and vegetable stock to create a robust broth.

5/SHIITAKE

According to a study from Australia's University of Wollongong, this mushroom reduces triglycerides (bad fats in the blood), and may possibly help prevent weight gain.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Shepherd's pie

TRY THIS Add shiitake in place of minced beef to create the vegetarian version. Don't forget the mixed veggies!

6/SWORD BELT

Like its cousin the poplar mushroom, it contains a peptide that fights fungus. A Chinese study also showed the mushroom's promising ability to suppress cancerous cells. However, it's an acquired taste - grassy yet salty.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Spaghetti Bolognese

TRY THIS Use it in a tomato-based pasta sauce, and Team Shape likes it with angel hair pasta.

7/MONKEY HEAD

Also known as the lion's mane, this mushroom has been found to stimulate nerve growth in animals. Experts speculate that it may improve brain function in those suffering from neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. It has a chewy bite and a mild, sweet taste.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Pork rib bak kut teh

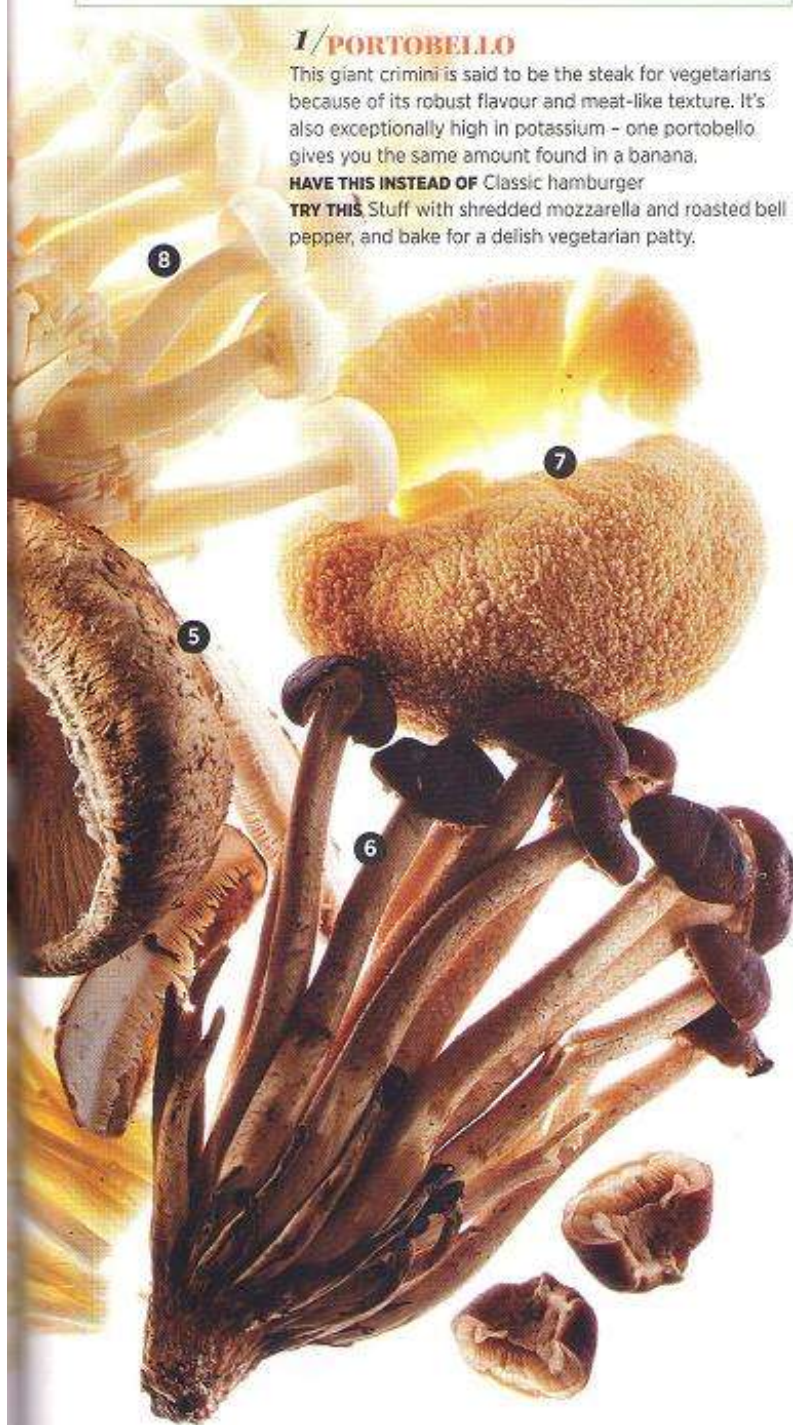
TRY THIS Swap pork for monkey head mushrooms in this peppery delight.

8/SHIMEJI

Grown near the base of beech trees, this mushroom is said to possess active compounds that may help prevent the growth of cancerous tumours, according to the National Institute of Japan. It has a buttery taste.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Spicy beef bulgogi

TRY THIS Recreate this tantalising dish by replacing meat with broccoli, tofu and shimeji.



"If you're getting fresh mushrooms, wrap them in a paper towel and store them in the fridge to help them last longer. Store dried ones in an airtight container and keep away from direct sunlight." — JACLYN REUTENS, DIETITIAN



THE OYSTER FAMILY

You'll recognise most of them from their caps that resemble the shellfish. A study conducted by Japan's Shimane Medical University noted that the mushroom can help to reduce cholesterol. Experts at the Methodist Research Institute in the US also found that among other mushrooms like the enoki and shiitake, the oyster was the most powerful in suppressing breast and colon cancer cells.

9/KING OYSTER

Its juiciness and firm texture make up for its blandness.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Bacon and eggs

TRY THIS Pan-sear slices with olive oil and sprinkle with rosemary, dill and onions. Serve with hot scrambled eggs.

10/PHOENIX

Also known as the Indian oyster, it has the taste of seawater. You'll like its irresistibly smooth and chewy texture.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Stir-fried chicken

TRY THIS Cook with Chinese cabbage, crunchy carrots, potato and garlic for a hearty dish.

11/WHITE HIRATAKE

Apart from its tough texture, this flat mushroom tastes similar to the Phoenix.

HAVE THIS INSTEAD OF Hawaiian pizza

TRY THIS Replace ham with this and bake with pineapple chunks, mozzarella cheese as well as green and red bell peppers on store-bought pizza dough.