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health smarts

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Fruits & Veggies

Summer officially arrives this month, and we all know it's far too short. So get outside and take advantage of the warm weather and your favorite outdoor activities.

No matter what outdoor activity you enjoy, you'll work up an appetite. Why not satisfy it with some great vegetables and fruits that are in season?

Not only do seasonal fruits and vegetables contain nutrients your body needs, but they're also delicious, cheaper when in season and quick to prepare.

So here are the top five picks that you can enjoy this summer.

Pineapples

This sweet tropical fruit isn't only low in calories and high in fiber, but it also has a number of joint-health benefits.

To start with, pineapple is a natural anti-inflammatory. It contains a mixture of enzymes called bromelain, which can help reduce swelling and pain. It's also high in vitamin C and manganese.

Pineapple is sweet, so it can also be a healthy alternative to ice cream and other sugar cravings you may have.

Picking a ripe pineapple is best, as this is when they have the most flavor and most developed concentration of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.



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The best way to know if the pineapple is ripe is to pull out one of the middle leaves. If it comes off easily, it is ready to eat. Pineapples don't ripen once they're picked, so avoid a green pineapple or one where the leaf doesn't come off easily.

Cucumbers

Cucumbers contain only 14 calories, so they're a great choice for healthy weight control.

Cucumbers also contain a substance called silica, which is one of the most important minerals for our joints



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because it helps build the cartilage and connective tissue that make these vital body structures.

Furthermore, cucumbers have a high water content that helps lubricate joints, as well as vitamin C and caffeic acid, both of which support skin integrity and reduce swelling.

Cucumbers are very sensitive to heat, so it's best to select them from the refrigerated section of the supermarket and keep them in your fridge at home. Cucumbers are great in salads, to flavor your water or served freshly cut with a hummus dip.

If you're someone who doesn't like to drink water, eating cucumbers maybe a helpful way to stay hydrated while out in the sun.



The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis is a research Center of Excellence at the University of Miami School of Medicine.

We have many clinical research studies for people living with spinal cord injury to participate in, including studies about pain, spasticity, exercise, walking, hand function, diet, sleep disruptions, and male fertility. Find more details by calling 305-243-7108 or at www.themiamiproject.org/studies.

To be considered for current and future research studies, you will need to complete a short Intake Form. This can be done online at <https://registry.med.miami.edu/intakeform> or you can call 305-243-7108 and request an Intake Form be mailed to you.

All research information is kept private and secure.

You can also complete an Intake Form to receive periodic research updates without participating in any studies.

For more information call 305-243-7108.

Tomatoes

Although tomatoes are enjoyed as a vegetable, they are, in fact, a fruit.



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Tomatoes are high in vitamins C, A and K and are also high in chromium, which is an important mineral for blood-sugar regulation. For individuals with spinal-cord injury or disease (SCI/D), blood-sugar regulation is important because of the high risk of insulin resistance and diabetes.

Tomatoes can come in a variety of forms such as cherry, plum, Roma, heirloom and green (which is just an unripened tomato).

Tomatoes contain citric, malic and oxalic acid, which can help to accelerate your metabolism and help filter out fatty deposits from the body, making it another great weight management food. They're high in antioxidants, have anti-inflammatory properties and can help protect against heart disease.

Tomatoes contain a substance called lycopene, which some studies suggest may help protect against cancer.

Avocados

Some people may tend to avoid eating avocados because they regard them as high in fat.

Although they're indeed high in the monounsaturated fat like that found in olive oil, that kind of fat is beneficial and associated with reduced risk of heart disease.

Studies have found that avocados can help reduce levels of low-density



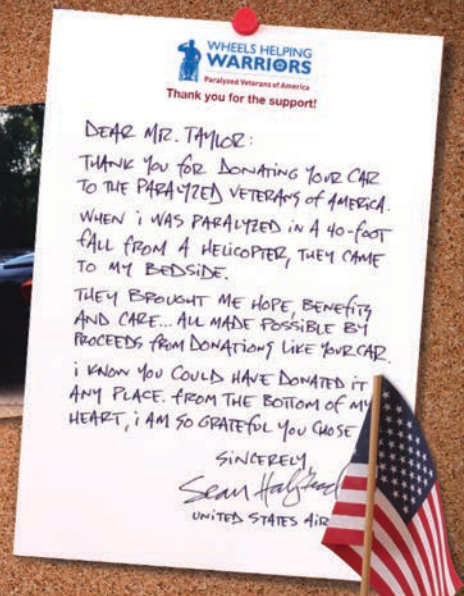
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lipoprotein cholesterol (the bad kind) and increase levels of high-density lipoprotein (the good kind).

Avocados are good to spread on your toast as an alternative to butter or jam and are great used in smoothies as an alternative to bananas to help thicken your drink. You can also mash avocados with a little salt as an alternative to mayonnaise in a tuna or chicken salad. They also can help you to feel full longer.

Blueberries

This little fruit isn't only sweet and tasty, but it packs a ton of nutrients that have an array of health benefits.



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Studies have shown that blueberries can help prevent the brain from oxidative stress and may reduce the effects of age-related decline, such as dementia and memory loss.

Blueberries contain resveratrol, the phytonutrient that's also found in red wine. Resveratrol is mostly found on the skin of the blueberry, and research has shown that it can help prevent heart disease and cancer.

Blueberries are high in fiber, which is important for healthy bowel regulation. They also promote urinary tract health, as they contain the same compound found in cranberries that helps to prevent or eliminate urinary tract infections, which is a common secondary health condition with SCI/D.

You can sprinkle blueberries on top of your oatmeal as a healthy alternative to maple syrup or brown sugar, put them in your yogurt, salads and muffins, or just eat them on their own.

For more ways to enjoy these tasty fruits and veggies, visit pvamag.com for recipes for gazpacho and guacamole.

Joanne Smith, CNP, and Kylie James, CNP, are co-authors of the Paralyzed Veterans of America-supported book Eat Well, Live Well with Spinal Cord Injury and Other Neurological Conditions. For more information on nutrition for neurological injuries, go to eatwelllivewellwithsci.com. ■



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