

Top 9 Foods You Need to Boost Your Mitochondria

Posted by Aric Cox, DC Jul 9, 2019

Eating the right food is the best possible foundation for pursuing optimal health. Supporting our mitochondria is one of the best ways to address chronic illness. The combination of these two concepts creates an ideal, multi-faceted approach toward healing.

Our mitochondria play a vital role in producing the very energy we need to live and breathe, as well as heal, detoxify, and strengthen our immunity. When our mitochondria are struggling, it often leads to neurological issues, chronic pain, or fatigue. Using the right food is necessary for repairing the damage created from inflammation, toxins, and infection.

The five most therapeutic, mitochondrial boosting nutrients, we receive from food are:

- Anti-oxidants
- B vitamins
- Sulfur
- Fats
- Magnesium

The following nine foods are great sources of these nutrients and are highly researched for their role in supporting mitochondria:

Antioxidants

Free radicals constantly bombard us from both our environment, and as natural byproducts of energy production. Antioxidants are great sponges for soaking up free radicals and preventing further damage. They are the most significant therapy derived from our diet to boost mitochondria.

Blueberries (other berries as well) are full of powerful antioxidants. In fact, the darker blue and purple berries (such as blueberries and blackberries) help to improve brainpower and protect our brain and nerves.¹ These foods support healthy blood sugar levels, due to their low glycemic index, and high amount of fiber.

- Something new – Try combining strawberries with balsamic vinegar, or blackberries with mint or rosemary, to unleash their flavor potential.

Pomegranate seeds (arils) have some of the highest amounts of antioxidants (three times higher than red wine or green tea).² They are also excellent sources of fiber, vitamin C, and potassium. Their rich source of phytonutrients, called polyphenols, is a major factor in brain health.³

- Worth the effort – Like most things beautiful, pomegranate seeds can play hard to get. But once removed they add flavor and color to anything from hummus to salsa.

B Vitamins

As co-enzymes, B vitamins work like keys for starting up mitochondrial engines (enzymes) in order to produce energy. We need daily replenishment of our B vitamin levels for optimal cellular function.

Beef (grass-fed) – You will find that a complete source of B vitamins can be found in grass-fed beef as well as other pasture-raised meat. Beef also has good levels of omega 3 fats for reducing inflammation.⁴ It is advisable to keep your servings on the small side and not eat beef every day.

- Game on – Try roaming over to buffalo or wild game for a different flavor. The more an animal grazes on grass and wild plants, the healthier it is.

Sulfur

Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, kale, cabbage, and collard greens, to name a few) are a great source of the much-needed sulfur element. Sulfur is the stinky, and super strong, nutrient that holds us together and eliminates toxins.

Broccoli, and broccoli sprouts, have higher levels of sulforaphane than any other vegetable. Sulforaphane is likely the most potent chemical responsible for removing the harmful environmental pollutants from our cells. This makes broccoli great for reversing degenerative damage in the nervous system, as well as slowing age-related decline in brain function.⁵

- Handle with care – Not to be cooked into mush, broccoli retains its highest detoxification power when it is lightly steamed (about 2 minutes).

Fats

Each one of our cells, and our mitochondria, are surrounded by a protective membrane. These membranes are made up of the fats we eat. When our diet consists of high-quality fats and oils, we can properly mend the fences that are a major part of our structural integrity and immune defense.

Olive oil (extra-virgin, cold-pressed) is a time-tested health food. It is full of phytonutrients to combat free radical damage and is an effective anti-inflammatory.⁶

- Green is good – When olive oil is properly processed, it should have a green color and a pleasantly strong flavor. Cooking with medium heat (or lower) will help preserve its health benefits.

Butter (grass fed) is a health-promoting food and not the maligned, fat-packing scourge that causes heart disease and obesity. Butter is full of about 400 different fatty acids and a good source of fat-soluble vitamins.⁷ It is just like the famed chef Julia Child once said, “You need some fat in your diet, or your body can’t process your vitamins.” Thus, cooking with butter actually helps us better absorb our vitamins.

- Go for the gold – Forget the pale stuff! Properly fed (i.e. grass) cows will produce golden butter that tastes amazing!

Salmon (wild Alaskan) is a fantastic source of the highly essential omega-3 fat, DHA. DHA is great for our brain, heart, eyes, and inflammation. Salmon contains the amino acid cysteine, which is helpful in producing the antioxidant, glutathione. It is also a good dietary source of CoQ10 and its benefits in energy production.

- Bought the farm – Put farm-raised salmon in the past. Salmon raised in this fashion is fed artificial coloring to make it orange while it is also higher in toxic chemicals like PCBs and heavy metals.⁸ Wild-caught is the way to go!

Magnesium

This hard-working mineral is needed daily as it performs hundreds of functions. Our mitochondria depend upon it in order to make ATP, our main source of cellular energy.

Avocado – It is well known that avocados are good for our brain.⁹ They are loaded with good fat as well as other mitochondria boosters like: glutathione, vitamin E, and antioxidants. Their magnesium content is high and their monounsaturated fat helps our gut absorb other nutrients.

- Brown bag special – Help unripe avocados along by keeping them at room temperature and in a brown paper bag.

Spinach and most green leafy vegetables contain healthy amounts of magnesium. Spinach also contains high levels of the antioxidants called flavonoids and carotenoids to support our mitochondria, memory, and cognition.¹⁰

- Yoke the “ox” – Those who have problems with oxalates might try boiling spinach for 1 minute to reduce oxalate levels but retain other beneficial nutrients.

Eating for our mitochondria is paramount to any other therapy. However, a well-rounded protocol includes detox support, stress management techniques, lifestyle changes, and supplementing with nutrients. To see more on which nutrients best support our mitochondria, see [How To Restore Your Mitochondria And Boost Your Energy](#).

References:

1. J Agric Food Chem. 2012 Jun 13; 60(23): 5709-15.
2. J Agric Food Chem. 2000 Oct; 48(10): 4581-9.
3. Neurobiol Dis. 2006 Dec; 24(3): 506-15. Epub 2006 Sep 28.
4. Nutr J. 2010 Mar 10; 9:10.
5. Neurosci Lett. 2009 Aug 28; 460(2): 103-7.
6. Vascul Pharmacol. 2014 Dec; 63(3): 127-34.
7. Food Nutr Res. 2008; 52: 10.3402.
8. Environmental Research. 2017; 155:49-59.
9. J Diabetes Res. 2015; 2015.
10. J Sci Food Agric. 2014 Apr; 94(6): 1042-56.