

Functional Foods

An Apple A Day...

One of the most popular references to functional foods, “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” dates back to 1866. The term “functional food” may be new, but the concept is not.

Functional foods are foods that provide health benefits beyond (in addition to) basic nutrition. They can be whole foods like apples, or enhanced packaged foods. In a sense, all fruits and vegetables are functional foods, since they contain antioxidants, which are known to be beneficial in preventing diseases like heart disease or cancer. There are other health benefits to functional foods as well. Functional foods may:

- improve gastrointestinal health
- help maintain good vision
- decrease menopause symptoms
- reduce blood pressure
- improve bone health
- protect against bacterial infections



Functional foods are becoming more and more popular, as people realize that foods may actually be able to help prevent disease, in addition to satisfying calorie and nutrient needs. There has been a great deal of research in the past two decades seeking to pinpoint specific health benefits to food. But no food is a magic bullet - disease cannot be prevented just by eating a certain food, but rather by maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Tomatoes and kiwi fruit are examples of 2 whole foods that pack a big nutritious punch.

Tomatoes are high in Vitamin C, an important nutrient for health. Researchers have also found that eating tomatoes and tomato products (containing the functional food component lycopene) may decrease the risk for developing certain cancers.

Kiwifruit is packed with Vitamin C, potassium, fiber, folate, magnesium, Vitamin E, lutein and copper. Recent studies have shown that kiwifruit may help work to thin blood, reduce clotting and lower fat in the blood that can cause blockage, without negatively affecting cholesterol levels.



Common ingredients you may see added to packaged food include:

- Vitamins and minerals such as calcium and vitamin C
- Fiber (in the form of inulin, gums, bran or other)
- Plant sterols/stanols
- Omega 3 fatty acids
- Probiotics