

Best & Worst Foods A Man Can Eat

We rate 54 of the most common foods, so you always know what to put on your plate

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FOOD RATING KEY

A = Eat as often as you like
B = Eat every day, in moderation
C = Eat once a week
D = Limit your intake
F = Public health hazard--be afraid, be very afraid

BREAKFAST

JUICE

In large amounts, your body OD's on the natural and added sugar in juice, storing it as fat instead of burning it as energy (as it would normally when you eat whole fruit). Rating: D

BAGELS

There are two sides to every bagel, and each of them represents one portion. Keep that in mind, and it's OK to indulge your carb cravings. Unless you work out in the morning. In that case, eat both halves to refill depleted energy stores. Rating: B

MARGARINE

It's packed with trans-fatty acids that can raise cholesterol levels. Stick with butter or a trans-fat-free option such as Smart Beat instead. Rating: D

BANANAS

Call it the morning-after fruit: Bananas help to restore the potassium that drunken, dehydrated cells need to fight a hangover. Rating: A

CITRUS FRUITS

Eat oranges and grapefruits, and someday your knees and elbows will thank you. Vitamin C-rich diets appear to lower the risk of some degenerative joint conditions. Rating: A

EGGS

Research shows you need about 6 grams of essential amino acids before or after your workout to maximize muscle growth. Which is perfect since that's about the amount you'll find in two large eggs. Rating: B

WHEAT GERM

Toss a scoop in yogurt, smoothies, or cereal: Because it's loaded with vitamin E, wheat germ helps to repair the damage to your muscle cells caused by intense exercise, allowing your body to recover faster. Rating: B

BACON

Leave regular bacon to the diner crowd. Pick Canadian instead; it has twice the protein and half the fat. Make the switch and you can bump bacon's grade up to a B. Rating: C

COFFEE

Go ahead, pour yourself a cup. The latest data shows that plain coffee may reduce diabetes risk and enhance power and endurance in well-trained athletes. Rating: B

HIGH FIBER CEREALS

Studies show that guys who eat bran cereal frequently are happier, more alert, and have greater energy levels than guys who don't. Oatmeal is just as powerful, drastically increasing the supply of fuel to working muscles. Rating for both: A

KIDS' CEREALS

Some brands are made up of nearly 45% sugar. If your favorite box has a comic on the back, check the nutrition label stat! If there are 8 g of sugar or fewer per serving, you're fine. Otherwise, it's time to terminate that tiger. Rating: C

LUNCH

FAST-FOOD BURGERS

When a whopping 64% of calories come from fat, even a low-carb marketing makeover can't turn this cash cow

into healthy food. Cruise home and grill your own. Rating: F

COTTAGE CHEESE

Yes, it's calcium- and protein-pumped, but this lumpy cheese isn't quite as wholesome as you may think. A cup of the curd packs 918 mg of sodium--more than 35% of a healthy daily salt intake--so if you have high blood pressure, limit your intake. Rating: B

TOMATOES

With just 35 calories and 40 percent of your daily vitamin C apiece--plus a bounty of cancer fighting lycopene in every bite--tomatoes are one of the best vegetables you can eat, even if you have to resort to getting them as sauce on your slice. Rating: A

PIZZA

Italian docs recently found that guys who ate a small 6-inch pizza once a week had a 22% lower chance of suffering a coronary than patients who rarely touched the stuff. Rating: C

CHILI

Drive-up chili is a good source of protein and slow-release carbs. It's also an excellent source of fiber, with a single-cup serving packing nearly 10 grams of artery-clearing, appetite controlling fiber. Rating: B

SUBS

Keep the meats lean, the vegetables plentiful, avoid mayonnaise-laden toppings, and this ship's a go. Rating: B

CHICKEN

At 27 g of protein per skin-and-boneless 3-oz breast, chicken is one of the best muscle foods on legs. Rating: A

FRENCH FRIES

Are they the new "cancer sticks"? Possibly, thanks to the combination of frying and a cancer-causer called acrylamide in every fry. Rating: F

SPINACH

The iron in spinach is spackle for your sinew, helping to rebuild the muscle-tissue that strength training tears down. Rating: A

APPLES

An apple a day could keep a hacking cough away. Studies show that apples help to counteract damage from inhaled cigarette smoke. Rating: A

ONIONS

Quercetin-rich onions help battle cataracts, cancer and heart disease. (But be careful! They don't do much for your social life.) Rating: B

NACHOS

Swap regular chips for baked, lowfat cheese for full, add some salsa, refried beans and guac, and the angry clash of chips and cheese redeems itself big time. Rating: C

SUSHI

Want to appear smarter? Order sushi. Types of fat called EPA and DHA in fatty fish like salmon are important components of brain and sperm cells. So you're covered no matter which body part you think with. Rating: B

TUNA

Studies shows that increasing protein intake to 1.4 g per kilogram of body weight helps to trigger muscle growth. A 3-oz can of tuna packs 20 g--providing a whole lot of bang toward bigger guns. Rating: A

DARK CHOCOLATE

The high-quality antioxidants in the cocoa justify this indulgence, helping to delay aging and prevent the buildup of cholesterol in your arteries. Just stick to small servings. Rating: B

TURKEY

Barflies, beware: All that alcohol may leave you peeing your zinc stores down the pub urinal, causing your testosterone levels to plunge. Gobbling turkey will help cover your losses. Light meat is a good source and has less fat than dark. Rating: A

SNACKS

BUTTERED POPCORN

A perfectly healthy whole-grain snack gone horribly wrong when drenched in butter or sugar. Eat it plain and it rates a B. Rating: F

CHOCOLATE MILK

Chocolate milk may be one of the best post-workout recovery drinks around, thanks to its high quality combo of protein and carbs--two nutrients in short supply after a hard bout of exercise. Rating: B

MUFFINS

Sounds virtuous, but a bakery-sized "Honey Bran Raisin" packs nearly 500 calories and 25% of the day's fat and carb grams. Rating: D

ANCHOVIES

GRAPES

Arguably the hardest-working, disease-fighting fruit you can eat. Not only do grapes contain resveratrol to help cancer-proof your cells, studies show they also contain a compound called pterostilbene that may help battle diabetes. Rating: B

BEANS

They're the Rodney Dangerfields of food--getting no respect, despite a rich supply of antioxidants that help to keep your aging body from rusting like a junkyard car. Although all beans are good, black beans are the most potent antioxidant source. Rating: A

LAMB

Olympic hopefuls, take note: A 3-oz lean cut of lamb packs a powerful shot-put of isoleucine, leucine, and valine, branched-chain amino acids that may delay fatigue in athletes. Souvlaki, anyone? Rating: B

FISH STICKS

Fish masquerading as "healthy." Don't be fooled: That mild white meat is most likely breaded in a trans-fat-soaked crust. Rating: F

WILD RICE

Technically, it's not rice at all. But so what? Wild rice is crammed with intense nutty taste. It's also full of appetite-stomping fiber that forces your gut to burn more calories. Not bad for what is actually the seeds for long-grain marsh grass. Rating: A