



ELITE
PERSONAL TRAINING & FITNESS SOLUTIONS

HEALTH TOPIC OF THE WEEK

12/4 - Functional Foods

Introduction

Superfoods. Superblends. Clean. No doubt you've seen adjectives like these when it comes to various nutrient claims. Do these words mean anything, or is it all hype? Buzzwords sound impressive. That's why they're in vogue. However, they're also vague. This article explores functional food and the food industry's attempt to capitalize on the term.



History of the functional food movement

Nutrition is a relatively young science, and the idea of functional foods and bioactive components is even younger.

From the early 1900s to the 1970s, nutrition research focused on vitamin deficiencies. The public was encouraged to eat more vitamin-fortified, processed foods to prevent nutrient deficiency diseases like scurvy, which is caused by a severe vitamin C deficit, or rickets, caused by prolonged vitamin D deficiency.

This emphasis on eating to correct nutrient deficiencies had the tendency to cause people to focus on certain nutrients, which can contribute to overeating. This, combined with an increased availability of highly processed foods, resulted in weight gain, which in turn led to increased rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

In 1980, the U.S. government published the first dietary guidelines that encouraged people to avoid fat, sugar and salt. Public health messaging encouraged people to replace fatty foods with starchy foods such as breads and pasta.



The logic of this recommendation was that if people consume less fat, they should increase their calories from carbohydrates to ensure adequate calories. That unfortunate nutritional advice contributed to the skyrocketing obesity and diabetes rates that continue today.



Elite Personal Training and Fitness Solutions does not provide medical treatment or intervention. We acknowledge scientific evidence that appropriately intensive exercise and sustainable nutritional intervention can have significant impact on chronic health disorders and obesity, dramatically improving symptoms when recommendations are followed. Please visit us at Eliteptf.com for more information and to schedule your evaluation.

Functional foods defined

Functional foods are not the same as superfoods. “Superfood” is a buzzword that marketers use to promote foods like kale, spinach and blueberries. Calling them “super” appeals to the public and increases sales. But superfood is generally meant to imply a food that is high in nutrients that are beneficial for health. For example, salmon and tuna are considered superfoods because the omega-3 fats they contain have been linked to heart health. Superfood advertisements claim that eating the food will improve certain aspects of health. The problem is that many of these claims are not based on extensive scientific research.

Functional nutrition uses a broader lens regarding how food functions in your body. As functional nutritionists, EPT trainers look at the big picture of eating. This includes how food is consumed, digested, absorbed, and assimilated, plus all psychosocial aspects involved with eating. We know that good food and nutrition make positive long term, sustainable changes that promote health and prevent disease.

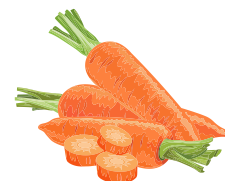
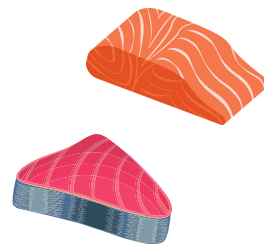
Bioactive compounds

In addition to the macro and micronutrients that our bodies need for growth and development, functional foods contain a variety of bioactive compounds, each with a unique function in the body. They are found naturally in whole foods or added to processed foods. The list of bioactive components grows daily as research expands. Though the components themselves are not new, evidence-based research confirming their health benefits is.

For example, carotenoids are the most easily recognizable examples of bioactive compounds. They are a group of 850 different pigments that give yellow, orange and red fruits and vegetables their color. Carotenoids primarily function as antioxidants, meaning they promote health by helping prevent free radical damage.

Beta-carotene is the most well-known carotenoid because of the high amounts found in carrots. Beta-carotene converts to vitamin A in the body after we consume it. Vitamin A is needed for normal vision. Lutein and zeaxanthin are the yellow carotenoids found in corn and peppers. They help support vision, especially among older adults. Research suggests that carotenoids from fruits and vegetables may help prevent certain cancers and improve heart health.

The food industry is well aware of the benefits of bioactive compounds, which processed foods lack. To increase appeal, these compounds are extracted, compounded or generated for use as additives in processed food. The goal is to improve the perception of nutritional quality and to entice consumers with health claims. In reality, this is like putting lipstick on a pig.



SCAN ME

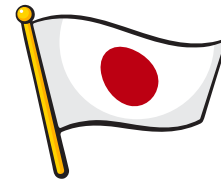


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Japan's focus on foods for health

Historically, the Japanese were one of the healthiest populations on Earth. However, as the 21st century approached, many Japanese adopted the American diet and developed health problems like those in the U.S.



As a result, the Japanese government became concerned about its citizens' expanding waistlines and declining health. To correct this problem, Japan became the first country to introduce the concept of functional foods in the 1980s.

Today, Japan uses the phrase "Food for Specialized Health Uses" for products that can be scientifically shown to promote health. It has paid off. Japan has more than 1,000 foods and beverages approved as food for specialized health uses, such as hypoallergenic rice. Rice allergies, though uncommon, are a problem for Japanese people who have them because rice is a staple food in the Japanese diet. About half of Japan's health claims relate to improving digestion using bioactive prebiotic dietary fibers.



Conclusion

Technically, all foods will function in some way in your body. Don't fall for the convenience or marketing hype in processed foods no matter how many "super" ingredients they claim to have. EPT's advice is to go for the bioactive compounds in whole foods and eat the rainbow. For specific recommendations, we are available for individual consultations. Please reach out to your trainer for more info.



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