Nutrient-Dense Foods

Did you know there are foods that provide us with more nutrients than others? These foods are called "nutrient-dense," and along with providing many health benefits, they are a more nutritious choice for our grocery budget.

What are nutrients?

Nutrients are vitamins and minerals found in food that provide nourishment for growth and support our bodies in functioning. There are six nutrients that are essential for life:

- Water
- Fat
- Carbohydrates
- Proteins
- Vitamins
- Minerals

What does "nutrient-dense" mean?

Nutrient-dense foods have more nutritional value than other foods. Eating foods higher in nutrients can help improve nutrient intake, which can provide health benefits such as preventing weight gain, promoting heart health, and reducing the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and cancer.

Nutrient-dense foods vs. calorie-dense foods

Nutrient-dense foods give you more nutrients per bite and tend to be less calorie dense. Sources of nutrient-dense foods are fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and many whole grains, such as kale, garlic, salmon and blueberries. Nutrient-dense foods are a great way to get the important nutritional elements you need while being budget conscious.

Calorie-dense foods give more calories per bite. Most processed foods are calorie-dense, like cakes, candies, and sodas. Avoiding processed foods can help maintain an appropriate calorie intake.

Buying nutrient-dense foods on a budget

- Buy whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean meats, etc. instead of processed foods. Shop the perimeter of the grocery store first where most whole foods are located.
- Buy in-season fruits and vegetables. Visit gotexan.org to access the Texas Produce Availability Chart to learn what's in season each month.
- Review store ads to know which whole foods are on sale.
- Use store coupons for whole, nutrient-dense foods. Don't be tempted to buy zero-nutrient foods because there are coupons for them.
- Visit farmers' markets to buy seasonal whole foods.
- Set aside a certain amount of your food budget specifically for nutrient-dense foods.

Table 1: Examples of Nutrient-Dense Foods

Food	Nutrient	Function
Salmon	Omega-3	Helps prevent heart disease and joint pain
Kale	Vitamin A	Aids with immune system function and eye health
	Vitamin C (antioxidant)	Helps with wound healing and iron absorption
Garlic	Vitamin A	Aids with immune system function and eye health
	Vitamin B6	Helps with nerve function, may prevent heart disease and required for protein absorption
	Calcium	Helps maintain strength in bones and teeth, muscle contraction, nerve function, normal blood clotting and may lower blood pressure
Blueberries	Antioxidants	Helps protect cells from damage or harm
Brussel sprouts	Vitamin A	Aids with immune system function and eye health
	Vitamin C (antioxidant)	Helps with wound healing and iron absorption
	Calcium	Helps maintain strength in bones and teeth, muscle contraction, nerve function, normal blood clotting and may lower blood pressure

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