



Is this your diet enemy?

Meet the seemingly innocent foods that could be harming your health and thwarting your slim-down efforts

So, you're eating smart but your wholesome diet hasn't helped you slim down or buzz with energy? We may have the answer – if you're not getting the results you crave, you could be piling your plate with the wrong foods for your body. We're all different, and the diet that works for one person may not work for you. So if you're suffering sore joints, feeling sluggish or simply can't shift those last few pounds, read up on the culprits that could be standing in the way of your best body ever.

NOT-SO-HEALTHY FOODS

NIGHTSHADE VEGETABLES

Are you sitting down? Good, because we've got some shocking news to share: tucking into platefuls of veggies might not lead to glowing health. Of course, vegetables aren't unhealthy, but certain types are thought to exacerbate joint disorders such as osteoarthritis and osteoporosis. Veggies from the nightshade family (named so because they grow at night), such as aubergines, peppers and tomatoes, contain a compound called oxalic acid which inhibits the absorption of calcium – an important mineral for keeping your bones healthy. Nightshade vegetables are also high in an alkaloid called solanine which, when consumed in high volumes, has been linked to inflammation. If you often suffer from joint pain, try cutting these vegetables out for two or three weeks to see if you notice a difference in your symptoms.

Choose this instead: Veggies from the brassica family, such as calcium-packed broccoli, are a good substitute for nightshade vegetables. Serve them with a sprinkle of turmeric, as this spice contains an anti-inflammatory ingredient called curcumin. And give your meals and fresh juices a healthy kick with fiery ginger – it's packed with compounds called gingerols which help to reduce joint pain.

GRAPEFRUIT

Do you start your day with a tall glass of grapefruit juice? Many prescription medications, from cholesterol-lowering statins to some forms of the Pill, interact with grapefruit – when taken together, the fruit can interfere with the way the drug is broken down. A 2012 study by scientists at Lawson Health Research Institute in London found that grapefruit interacts with a whopping 43 major prescription drugs. They also found that eating one grapefruit a day or drinking a 200ml glass of juice was enough to cause side effects including heart problems.

Choose this instead: If you're taking any prescription medications always read the labels and cut out grapefruit where advised. Opt for veg-based smoothies instead of supermarket juices to downgrade your risk.

YOGHURT

Yoghurt has a (well-deserved) reputation for easing digestive disorders thanks to its hefty probiotic content. Natural yoghurt is also a great source of protein and calcium. The bad news? Experts have linked dairy intake with an exacerbation of seasonal allergies. It's thought casein, a natural protein in dairy, may increase mucus production. If you think you might have a sensitivity to dairy, go without for two weeks to see how you feel.

Choose this instead: Switch to coconut yoghurts – these are dairy, soya and gluten free, making them ideal for those with food intolerances and vegans. Try Coyo Natural Coconut Milk Yoghurt, £1.99, ocado.com.

PEANUT BUTTER

Peanut butter is one of the nation's favourite spreads, but many brands are chock-full of salt, sugar and trans fats. As far as nuts go, peanuts are considered the least healthy as they can contain toxic compounds called aflatoxins, thought to cause inflammation.

Choose this instead: Replace it with raw almond, Brazil nut or cashew nut butter. These are high in protein, vitamins and minerals and available from health stores.



MARGARINE

If you studiously avoid butter in favour of vegetable oil spreads in an effort to do your health and waist a favour, your ticker may be taking a hit. Margarine is made by heating fat molecules to high temperatures and adding chemicals to change the colour to yellow. Scientists at the National Institute of Health in the US found that eating margarine can double the risk of heart disease. On the other hand, spreading your morning toast with butter will naturally increase your levels of vitamin A and 'good' cholesterol – essential ingredients for a healthy nervous system, strong eyes and a smart brain.

'Grapefruit interacts with a whopping 43 prescription drugs'

Choose this instead: Sidestep vegetable oil-based spreads next time you're doing your supermarket shop and look out for organic, unsalted butter instead. Organic butter is churned from milk produced by cows that have been reared outdoors.

WHEAT BRAN

Wheat bran is often billed as a wonder food for healthy bowels. Although this breakfast staple is high in insoluble fibre – the kind you need to bulk up waste products and send them out of your system – it has an abrasive action on the insides of your gastrointestinal tract (think rubbing sandpaper on your insides). Not surprisingly, this interferes with digestion and can leave you feeling heavy and bloated. Wheat bran is also a mass-produced product, grown on soil which is relatively low in minerals, resulting in a product with few health benefits.

Choose this instead: Swap your bowl of bran flakes for a healthy bowl of quinoa porridge, made with a dairy-free milk such as almond or coconut milk, and serve it with a sprinkle of mixed seeds and berries.

POTATOES

Spuds are a fabulous source of potassium and vitamin C, but their starch content makes them a high glycaemic load (GL) vegetable. The starch is quickly absorbed by the body, causing your blood sugar to shoot up. High blood sugar levels can make it harder for you to lose weight and puts you at risk of developing type 2 diabetes over time.

Choose this instead: New potatoes are considered one of the lowest GL spuds, so opt for these over your usual white potatoes. To lower the blood sugar effect, bake rather than boil your potatoes and eat them with protein, such as fish or meat. To add some variety to your diet, try munching on sweet potato or butternut squash as an alternative to spuds – they're great mashed or baked. ❧