



The Be Fit Minute

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FLAVOR-ENHANCING INGREDIENTS FOR YOUR KITCHEN



Feeling blah about your meals lately? Try these five foods to add flavor, nutrients, and variety to what you already eat. To keep your taste buds engaged, it helps to add sweet, savory, and acidic notes to what you cook. Remember: food that tastes good may mean eating less will feel more satisfying. See below for ways to incorporate healthy, flavor-boosting tricks into your culinary repertoire.

Five Nutritious Flavor Boosters to Keep On Hand

CUMIN

A spice with nutty, citrusy notes often found in Indian, Middle Eastern, and Mexican cuisine.

Why it works: It elevates flavors. It can bring depth to tomato-based recipes, like tomato soup or chili. It also compliments legumes, like lentils and chickpeas. Try mixing some cumin in with hummus.

Noteworthy Nutrition: A little packs a punch. 1 tsp of ground cumin contains 15% of your daily value of iron. (In fact, many dried herbs are good sources of minerals.) Cumin may also have natural antibacterial and antioxidant (disease-fighting) properties.

ANCHOVIES

A tiny, oily fish that is sustainable and low in the environmental toxins that often plague larger fish, like swordfish. In most cases you can't tell that anchovies are present in dishes: they just add a rich, savory flavor that is often referred to as "umami." (It's a little like a natural version of MSG.)

Why it works: They enhance the flavor of vegetable-based dishes. To prepare anchovies, simply heat them in a pan with some olive oil and minced garlic. Add some bread crumbs to your sauté pan and you have a quick, crunchy topping for cooked vegetables like cauliflower, broccoli, and greens such as sautéed kale or spinach.

Noteworthy Nutrition: Anchovies contain protein and are a source of heart-healthy omega-3 fats. They are also a source of calcium. Just be careful of their salt content: one anchovy contains about 140 mg of sodium.

LEMON

Lemons are often passed over when we think of "fruit," but they are easy to find, incredibly versatile, and offer up health benefits.

Why it works: A little goes a long way to brighten flavors and balance out sweet and salty meal components. (Lemon works with both sweet and savory foods.) To make a lemon vinaigrette, combine one part lemon juice to three parts oil and mix in just enough Dijon mustard to thicken it slightly. For a subtle lemony flavor, place lemon slices underneath fish prior to broiling or baking it or zest a lemon peel over some rice.

Noteworthy Nutrition: 2 tbsp lemon juice provides 25% your daily value of vitamin C. Lemons also contain antioxidants, which help protect your body from free radicals that can cause damage to your tissues and blood vessels; they also have cancer-fighting properties.

RAISINS

Raisins are a simple, antioxidant-rich fruit that won't spoil on you.

Why it works: The natural sweetness that raisins offer can help counterbalance the bitterness naturally present in some foods. They work especially well with strong-flavored vegetables like dandelion, broccoli rabe, and swiss chard. Raisins also complement salty items and pair nicely with dishes that call for capers, Greek olives, and feta.

Noteworthy Nutrition: Raisins contain minerals, such as iron and potassium. They are also a source of fiber to help aid in satiety.

WALNUTS

Walnuts are occasionally overlooked due to their high fat content, but they contain heart-healthy fats and, when used in moderation, they can greatly enhance both sweet and savory dishes.

Why it works: Walnuts add texture and provide a warm, nutty flavor to foods, both of which lend complexity to your meal. Walnuts work nicely in whole grain-based dishes and with vegetables. Try adding them to winter vegetables, like Brussels sprouts, or roasted squash. They also work wonders in salads and can get crushed into fruit crumble and cobbler recipes.

Noteworthy Nutrition: Walnuts are a plant-based source of omega-3 fatty acids, which promote heart health. Walnuts also contain a variety of antioxidant-containing compounds, which means they are cancer-fighters too.