

# Alliums' Powerful Health Benefits

Normally I start the day with a green smoothie. To get things going, I toss a handful of kale in the Vitamix along with a couple cups of super-herb tea or almond milk. If I find myself out of Kale, I will throw in a scoop or two of a good nutrition powder (here's a link to make your own green formula). Then, in go my super foods: coconut oil, flax and hemp seeds, raw cacao powder, maca, and vanilla.

Next comes a handful of frozen blueberries. (I always have a stash frozen organic blueberries in the freezer!) To give it an extra digestive boost, I will often also add a cup of homemade kefir or a high quality probiotic. If it's cold outside, I will add some warming spices: cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, etc. Be careful not to cook the probiotics in the blender by blending too fast or long.

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If I'm fighting off inflammation, when I have it on hand, I'll also add an inch or so of fresh turmeric root. To keep the concoction low-glycemic, sometimes I sweeten it with a few drops of liquid stevia. This green super food smoothie starts my day off right by alkalizing and energizing me, and it provides me with a serious dose of the dense, high-quality nutrition. It keeps me going for hours!

## Today Was Different

Today, however, for some reason, I was craving something savory – something warm and nourishing. Perhaps it's the winter weather or the fact that the flu has been going around town. I opened the fridge to see what would appeal to me. Immediately the food that popped out at me was leeks. Leeks...

Hmm, leeks for breakfast? I trust what my body is telling me, so here goes!

I grabbed one out of the vegetable drawer, gave it a rinse, peeled off the outer skin, chopped it up and tossed it in a cast-iron pan along with a big spoonful of coconut oil and started sautéing. Next, I ripped up the kale leaves that normally would have gone in my smoothie and tossed them in as well. Two ounces of wild smoked salmon found its way, crumbled, into the pan next. Finally, I cracked two pasture-raised eggs, added a pinch of salt, and voila: a moment later I had a leek-salmon-kale-scramble on the plate. It looked and smelled great, and tasted even better!

So what was the deal? What was my body craving when it so clearly said, "Go for the leeks!" I decided to do a bit of research. I knew leeks are in the allium family, which also includes onions, garlic, shallots, chives, and scallions, but what I discovered shocked me. It turns out that alliums are health-promoting, disease-fighting, phytonutrient powerhouses! First of all, they are high in hard-to-get vitamin K, which the body needs to build strong bones and combat heart disease. The body also needs vitamin K for a variety of other crucial metabolic functions.

## Leeks

Leeks, in particular, are high in manganese, which the body also needs to build strong bones, as well as copper, another essential mineral of which many people are deficient, and the B vitamin, folate. Folate, which has multiple health benefits including fighting depression and promoting healthy red blood cell development, is present throughout all parts of a leek: the leaves, stem and the bulb, in one of its bioactive forms, 5-methyltetrahydrofolate or 5MTHF. Good thing, that apart from the tough outer casing, I sautéed the whole plant for my breakfast! But those nutrients found in leeks are just the

beginning. Vegetables in the entire allium family are loaded with other kinds of “phytonutrients.”

Phytonutrients are compounds found in plants that are key to human health. Some examples are the antioxidants found in the raw cacao and the plant sterols found in the maca that I put in my smoothie. Antioxidants fight free-radicals in the body that can damage cells through oxidation. The plant sterols in maca tone the reproductive system, improve stamina and lower cholesterol. Wild salmon is loaded with vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids. Coconut oil contains caprylic acid, lauric acid, and capric acid that are unique medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs) that provide the body with easily digested energy and lower cholesterol. Coconut oil is also a potent anti-microbial and anti-fungal.

## **Mother of All Antioxidants**

Alliums are one of the foods highest in an antioxidant that New York Times bestselling author, Mark Hyman, MD calls the “Mother of All Antioxidants:” glutathione. Glutathione is a “glycoprotein,” or a protein molecule with a sugar molecule attached to it, which is needed by every cell in your body, and like copper, almost everyone is deficient in it. It boosts immunity, lowers your risk of heart attack, helps detoxify the body, is anti-cancer, anti-diabetes, etc., etc., etc.!

Alliums are also full of “organosulfur compounds,” hence their strong smell and flavor. Organosulfur compounds also have a long list of major health benefits. First of all, they are extremely active antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal agents! They are also anti-inflammatory and thought to lower the risk for cardiovascular disease.

Allicin, the most prevalent organosulfur compound in alliums, especially present in raw garlic, is a major immune-enhancer. Studies have shown that allicin has the ability to lower total cholesterol, LDL, or “bad cholesterol” and triglycerides, and

increase HDL, or “good cholesterol.” Therefore, allicin supports the functioning of the circulatory system and thus lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, and atherosclerosis. The list doesn’t end there, though! Allicin is even thought to be anti-cancer, and the digestion of allicin in the body produces another master antioxidant, sulfenic acid. Research shows that this phytonutrient neutralizes free radicals faster than even glutathione!

Alliums, like my leek this morning, are also high in other health-promoting “flavonoid” antioxidants as well, such as quercetin. Flavonoids are plant metabolites that plants use for their own protection and health that also provide us with excellent health benefits such as fighting inflammation and helping us ward off viruses and microbes. In addition to being an antioxidant that is both anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial, quercetin is also a natural antihistamine. In other words, it is anti-allergenic!

Leeks also contain the flavonoid kaempferol, which helps prevent free-radical damage to blood vessel linings. Another antioxidant flavonoid found in leeks, and in all alliums, is gallic acid. Studies have shown that gallic acid prevents cellular mutations and is toxic to cancer cells while having no negative effect on healthy cells. Like allicin, it’s also anti-cancer, anti-viral and anti-fungal. And studies have also shown gallic acid to prevent “neuronal cell death.” In other words, it helps stop the degeneration of the nervous system which happens in Alzheimer’s or during strokes. Therefore consumption of alliums may reduce the severity of strokes and might be an anti-aging compound. It could even help you think more clearly!

The list of phytonutrients and the health benefits of consuming alliums goes on and on. Some of them have anti-inflammatory actions that protect against osteoarthritis and ward off infections. Others may protect against asthma, prevent obesity, aid in detoxification and lower blood

pressure. Needless to say, the leek I ate this morning could definitely help me ward off the flu. Of course, make sure you eat organic alliums. Organic alliums are higher in minerals and phytonutrients, lower in pesticide residues, and infinitely better for the environment than conventionally grown alliums. Tomorrow, I might go back to my green smoothie for breakfast. But today I am going to enjoy the multiple health benefits of the mighty leek!

### **Recommended Reading:**

- *How To Kill Candida, Fungi, Yeast in the Body*
- *Make Your Immune System Bulletproof with These Natural Remedies*
- *Things You Should Know About Garlic – DIY, Recipes, Other Tips*
- *Remedies and Cures For The Common Diseases, Volume 1*, by Anil Sinha
- *Super Immunity* by Dr. Joel Fuhrman
- *Polyphenols in Human Health and Disease*, edited by Ronald Ross Watson, Victor R. Preedy, Sherma Zibadi

### **Sources:**

- *Leeks – The World's Healthiest Foods*
- *9 Ways to Boost Glutathione* – Dr. Axe
- *The Healthiest, Anti-Cancer Foods: G-BOMBS* – Dr. Fuhrman