

Health Watch: Superfoods to Help Pilots Stay Healthy

By John Perkinson, Staff Writer

In between legs and hungry for a quick bite? Consider packing (or purchasing) the latest crop of superfoods that are trending as better options for maintaining a healthy diet. Simply choosing the right foods can improve your mood and attitude, and most importantly for airline pilots increase your energy and mental acuteness. And eating healthy for the long haul can up the odds that your piloting career will end in retirement—not cut short due to a health-related condition.



A balanced diet should focus on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Whether you're at home having dinner with your family or grabbing a bite at a layover restaurant, consider eating one or more of the following nine "superfoods" at mealtime or when you're ready for a snack.

1. **Blueberries** are highly nutritious and among the world's most powerful sources of antioxidants. They're high in soluble fiber and vitamins C and K, and they're believed to improve memory and brain function. Their nutrients can help improve heart health, and they've been shown to attack cancer-causing free radicals and possibly even block certain tumor cells from forming.

2. **Greek yogurt** is a great food to increase your protein intake and is a good source of potassium, calcium, iodine, and vitamin B12. What differentiates Greek yogurt from traditional yogurt? Greek yogurt has been strained to remove the whey, which results in 40 percent less sugar, 38 percent less sodium, and twice the amount of protein as compared to traditional yogurt.



3. Next time you're in the grocery store produce section, be sure to grab some **kale**. This green cruciferous vegetable contains vitamins A, C, and K and minerals like calcium, copper, iron, manganese, phosphorus, and potassium. Kale helps you maintain strong skin, hair, and bones while promoting good digestion and reducing the risk of heart disease. It's also high in fiber and contains lutein for eye health.

4. There's good news for you java junkies. A National Institutes of Health study found that "**coffee** drinkers were less likely to die from heart disease, respiratory disease, stroke, injuries and accidents, diabetes, and infections...." Coffee can help burn fat and may prevent Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Other benefits include reducing the chances of diabetes and liver disease. However, excessive amounts can lead to cardiovascular problems and sleep deprivation, so drink responsibly.

5. **Asparagus** is one of the most nutritionally well-balanced vegetables available. It's high in folic acid and a great source of potassium, fiber, and thiamin, as well as vitamins A, B6, and C. These nutrients promote immune system, heart, prostate, and eye health. Asparagus contains protein and iron and also helps reduce the risk of prostate cancer.



6. Nutritionists have long recommended that you replace butter with **olive oil**, which has been shown to help prevent numerous diseases and is believed to counter the effects of aging, osteoporosis, and skin damage. Olive oil contains vitamins E and K as well as a wide range of antioxidants and contributes to the operational health of the stomach, pancreas, and intestines.

7. When your mother told you to eat your **oatmeal**, she knew what she was talking about. Eating the whole grains contained in oatmeal can lower your risk for several diseases, including high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. This traditional breakfast food is high in fiber, low in fat, and high in protein. It's also loaded with iron and other minerals. But avoid prepackaged oatmeal because it's often high in sodium and sugar.

8. Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush made it crystal clear that he did not like **broccoli**, but this green vegetable is high in fiber and antioxidants, and contains vitamins A, B9, C, and K. Nutrients from this member

of the cabbage family support your eyes, red blood cells, immune system, bones, and tissues. Broccoli also contains phytochemicals that help fight arthritis and cancer.

9. An **apple** a day might just keep the doctor away. Easy to transport, apples are high in fiber and vitamin C, low in calories, and contain no fat or cholesterol. They're a great source of potassium and antioxidants, and they slow the absorption of glucose in the body, helping to maintain a healthy blood sugar level.

Making these nine superfoods part of your healthy diet can help you feel and perform your best, whether you're in the cockpit or spending time with family and friends.

This article is from the September 2015 issue of *Air Line Pilot* magazine, the Official Journal of the Air Line Pilots Association, International—a monthly publication for all ALPA members.

