

SURPRISINGLY GOOD-FOR-YOU

# SEASONAL TREATS

HIDDEN BENEFITS OF THE SEASON'S TASTIEST TREATS

The holidays can be a time to indulge, but it turns out that some seemingly decadent seasonal foods are, in fact, quite good for you. Here are a handful of treats that come with hidden benefits. Enjoy these goodies in moderation, of course.



## Cocoa

When the mercury dips, a cup of hot cocoa is one of life's simple pleasures. And giving in to this craving has its benefits. For instance, cocoa contains antioxidants called flavonoids that can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Research shows eating dark chocolate (with a high percent of cocoa solids) can help reduce levels of hormones associated with stress, especially for those with high anxiety. And even the mere sight of chocolate can evoke a smile, according to one British survey.

**Make this quick cocoa:** Combine 1 tablespoon natural cocoa powder and 1 tablespoon sugar (or the equivalent amount of a natural nonnutritive sweetener) in a mug. Swirl in 1 cup steaming low-fat milk. Spice it up with one of these add-ins: orange peel and ground cloves, ground cardamom and vanilla or chili powder and cinnamon.



## Maple Syrup

When extended family is in for the holidays, there's no easier breakfast than whole-grain pancakes or waffles—with a side of maple syrup, of course. While you don't want to drench your stack in syrup (too much of the sweet stuff racks up calories), a little could be a good thing. Maple syrup contains polyphenols, antioxidants that quell the inflammation that's linked to a slew of health conditions, from cancer to arthritis. Darker syrups have the highest levels of antioxidants.

**Other ways to savor maple syrup:** Sweeten a latte or toss roasted sweet potato wedges with it.



## Nuts

Yes, nuts are high in calories and fat, but they're also chock-full of vitamins, minerals and *heart-healthy* fats. They're a super-satisfying snack and add flavor and crunch to any meal. What's more, research suggests that people who eat nuts—walnuts, pecans, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios, pine nuts and peanuts (which are actually legumes)—a few times a week have a lower incidence of heart disease than people who eat them less often. Walnuts in particular are rich in alpha-linolenic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid linked to heart health and improved mood.

**Spice up walnuts with this simple recipe:** Place ½ cup of walnuts in a small skillet; heat over medium heat until hot. Drizzle with 2 teaspoons tamari (or reduced-sodium soy sauce) and stir until the nuts are coated and the pan is dry, about 1 minute. Transfer to a bowl to cool.

## Fresh Gems of the Season

These seasonal produce picks may already have virtuous reputations, but they're so delish they could count as treats.

**Sweet Potatoes:** Creamy sweet potatoes are rich in alpha and beta carotene, compounds the body converts into vitamin A, which helps keep your eyes, bones and immune system functioning. Choose those with taut, papery skins, tapered ends and a uniform shape and color.

**Cranberries:** Beautiful and festive, cranberries are often a highlight of holiday spreads. They're also a good source of vitamin C and fiber, and deliver several antioxidants associated with cancer prevention. Find fresh bagged cranberries in the produce section. Cranberries can also be kept in your freezer for several months.

**Pomegranates:** A sprinkling of pomegranate seeds adds a pop of color to any dish, and the juice is rich in antioxidants. Look for pomegranates that feel heavy for their size. They'll keep at room temperature for up to 3 weeks or refrigerated for up to 2 months.

**Facts Up Front** helps busy shoppers by summarizing important nutrition information in a clear, simple and easy-to-use format on the front of food and beverage packages. In this voluntary labeling program, the facts are straight from the FDA-regulated Nutrition Facts panel on the side or back of food packages.