

5

foods for a fit summer body

Some foods are just made for warm summer days. These fitness-friendly meals will help you make the most of fresh summer produce.

BY LOUISE WEDGEWOOD



Photo: shutterstock

You know that the work you put in at the gym is only part of the secret to seeing your abs; it is the food you put on your plate that either makes or breaks your results. Fresh produce is a no-brainer when it comes to giving your body the nutrients it needs without the extra calories. The correct produce to eat, however, is no longer as clear.

We are so accustomed to having 'fresh' produce all year round that we often do not realise what we are eating has been flown from the other side of the globe. Eating fruit and vegetables that are in season and have not been imported means the food arrives on our plates with a higher nutritional value. Plus, the flavour of seasonal food is unbeatable.

There is little competition after tasting the flavour of a glossy red tomato that ripened just down the road compared to its sun-deprived cousin transported from another time zone – the imported tomato is about as tasty as the bag you brought it home in. Visit a traditional fruit and vegetable shop or a local farmers market and you can be sure you will bring home the most flavoursome fresh produce.

These fun meal ideas for five-star summer foods will help you create a beach-ready booty.

Tomatoes

Tomatoes offer the well-known lycopene, an abundant range of antioxidants and phytonutrients, as well as a host of health benefits. Tomatoes can help to lower total cholesterol, bad (LDL) cholesterol and triglycerides. Like all fruits and vegetables, tomatoes are a low-calorie and nutrient-rich food. Filling your plate with foods like these leaves you more room for beachside cocktails and sunset beers.

If you haven't made a chilled soup yet this summer, put tomatoes on your shopping list. Use the beautiful red soup for a simple, refreshing lunch or to impress your partner by adding an entrée to your home-made dinner.

To make it, cook some garlic in a saucepan before adding equal parts diced tomatoes and stock, a diced red capsicum, a splash of lemon juice and a dash of cayenne pepper (to give your metabolism a boost). Blend and then chill.

Or you could make tuna-stuffed tomatoes for a high-protein snack, appetiser or main meal. Mix tinned tuna, finely chopped cucumber, red onion, olives and herbs. Slice the top off the tomatoes, scoop out their flesh and then fill the cavity with the tuna mixture. Grate parmesan cheese on top and place tomatoes under the grill until the cheese is gorgeously golden.

Basil

As well as being rich in flavonoids and anti-bacterial properties, basil can nix your post-exercise muscles aches. It inhibits the same enzyme as non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medications like aspirin and ibuprofen.

Basil grows like crazy over summer. Plant a seedling or two and you will have bunches of it to regularly create this waistline-friendly pesto and make meals even more delicious.

Blend a large bunch of basil, a small clove of garlic and tablespoon of lemon juice with a quarter cup of olive oil. Use it to jazz up an omelette, top a grilled chicken breast or even pour it over bean salads and steamed vegetables. Experiment by combining basil with any fresh herbs on hand. Tip: Freeze the extra pesto in ice cube trays for another meal.

Cucumbers

With just 12 calories per 100g you might assume cucumbers provide little more than water in a green skin. It is true that they are a refreshing food to curb your hunger with minimal calories, but cucumbers also contain unique lignans. These act as antioxidants and reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease as well as breast, uterine, ovarian, and prostate cancers.

Serve a low-carb nibble with drinks by topping crisp slices of cucumber with smoked salmon, Swiss cheese or cottage cheese.

Alternatively you could create a delicious high-protein meal with a grilled fillet of salmon and a cucumber salad. To make the salad, thinly slice Lebanese cucumbers and toss with chopped coriander, mint and chilli. Drizzle with a Thai dressing made from two tablespoons of lime juice and a tablespoon each of fish sauce and brown sugar.

Plums

Plums contain unique phytonutrients called neochlorogenic and chlorogenic acid which will give you plenty of antioxidants to combat the increased oxidative stress that comes with exercise. The fruit also contains vitamin C which will assist your body to absorb iron from the steak you had for dinner.

Base desserts on fresh summer fruit and you can have something sweet after dinner without undoing your hard work in the gym. Turn plain plums into something special by halving and caramelising them on the BBQ or under the grill. Serve with a spoonful of Greek yoghurt and a drizzle of honey.

Plums can also become breakfast to go by preparing this compote the night before: simmer two cups of plums, a sliced lemon, a cup of water, one tablespoon of sugar and a sprinkle of nutmeg for about 15 minutes. Enjoy over oats or with yoghurt.

Raspberries

Berries are a well-known super-food and raspberries offer an outstanding range of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory nutrients that are harder to get anywhere else. The long list includes anthocyanins, flavonoids, stilbenoids, phenolic acids, tannins and lignans. As well as being a fabulous source of fibre and vitamin C, they also offer the bone-building ingredients vitamin K, manganese and magnesium. All that nutrition comes at a low price in carbs with raspberries containing less than five per cent sugar.

Throw together an amazing chicken and avocado salad like never before by adding a raspberry dressing. Puree a cup of raspberries, two teaspoons of lemon juice and a tablespoon each of olive oil and red wine vinegar. Slice cooked chicken breasts and toss with baby spinach and rocket leaves, cucumber and avocado before adding the dressing.

Alternatively, pack a high-protein and downright impressive snack for work by making individual raspberry, cottage cheese and coconut parfaits in plastic containers. You'll be the envy of all your colleagues. **UFM**

Louise Wedgwood is a health and fitness writer and qualified personal trainer. Follow her on Twitter @louisewedgwood or email louise.wedgwood@gmail.com for words for your blog, website or newsletter. >