

THE POWER 12

The Powerfoods That Will Shrink Your Waist
and Change Your Body—Forever

POWER COMES FROM ALL KINDS of sources. For a car, it's gasoline. For your new plasma TV, it's electricity. For bedroom toys, it's a pair of double-A Duracells. For you? It's food. Food is your fuel, your electricity, your nutritional battery pack. Food not only gives you the ability and energy to move, live, work, and play, but it also gives you the power to change your body—for better or worse.

You already know full well what the bad ingredients (like sugar, saturated fat, and high-fructose corn syrup) can do. On the flip side, food can flatten a bulging middle if you douse your body with good-for-you ingredients like protein, whole-grain carbohydrates, unsaturated fats, fruits, vegetables, and fiber.

Easy in theory but tougher in practice, when we're so often tempted by restaurant menus, misleading marketing on food packages, and carnival foods. That's why I created the Abs Diet Power 12, an easy-to-remember, easier-to-implement eating plan that gives you the ability to eat properly at home, restaurants, business dinners, parties, ballparks . . . anywhere. Remember this simple formula, base your meals around these foods, and you'll power yourself with the fuel that'll steer your body in any direction you want.

Almonds and other nuts**Beans and legumes****Spinach and other green vegetables****Dairy (fat-free or low-fat)****Instant oatmeal (unsweetened, unflavored)****Eggs****Turkey and other lean meats****Peanut butter****Olive oil****Whole-grain breads and cereals****Extra-protein (whey) powder****Raspberries and other berries****12!**

Almonds and Other Nuts

FOR A LONG TIME, nuts were the Robert Downey Jr. of the supermarket—they got a lot of bad press, though there was an awful lot to like about them. They had the rap of having too many calories and too much fat and destroying too many intestinal tracts. But nuts are rich in monounsaturated fats—meaning that they help increase the amount of good cholesterol in your body to help clear your arteries. They're also high in protein, which helps build muscle and keeps you satiated throughout the day. That's why I consider them the ultimate snack. Include a couple of handfuls throughout the day (don't overload, because they are indeed high in calories); aim for up to 70 almonds a day (15 to 20 as a snack). That's the number that people in one study ate daily for 6 months, in conjunction with a reduced-calorie diet, to drop 18 percent of their body weight. Go for whole almonds, dry-roasted or in their unsalted, raw state.

INCLUDES:

Almonds and other nuts**Pumpkin and sunflower seeds****Avocados (fruit with a mild, nutlike flavor)**

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Salted or smoked nuts

Beans and Legumes

GROWING UP, we knew beans as side dishes at barbecues. Now that we're older, we know a bean's exact place in the kitchen: everywhere. Beans are such a powerful food—high in protein and satiating fiber—that they're one of the staples that will help you build muscle, burn fat, and refrain from feasting on Ding Dongs. Beans are your pantry's ultimate handyman—because of their versatility. You can serve them as side dishes or dump them in chili, burritos, soups, and salads.

INCLUDES:

Beans

Lentils

Peas

Chickpeas

Edamame

Hummus

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Baked beans (high in sugar)

Refried beans (many are high in saturated fat)

Spinach and Other Green Vegetables

LET'S FACE IT: Vegetables have about as much sex appeal as a laser printer. But the fact is that the produce aisle is exactly where you'll find many of the disease-fighting, belt-shortening foods you should include in your diet. While some vegetables are packed with fiber (like broccoli), others are also rich in vitamins (like spinach). More subtly, they help satisfy the common crunch craving, keeping you away from button-popping chips, crackers, and cookies. My

suggestion: Get a week's worth of crunchy vegetables, cut them up, and store them in the fridge. Reach there for them at night, or pack some for lunch.

INCLUDES:

Cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli and cauliflower)
Green, yellow, orange, and red vegetables

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Vegetables fried or drenched in butter or cheese

Dairy

FOR ALL THE GOOD that dairy products do, we ought to expand milk mustaches to full-on beards. More and more evidence suggests that calcium and dairy products—long recognized as essential to bone health—are also crucial for weight loss. One study found that the daily consumption of three or more servings of dairy foods seems to target belly fat. In fact, people with the highest intakes had the leanest midsections—by an average of nearly 2 inches. The calcium that accompanies dairy foods may block fat absorption and make fat less likely to be stored in the abdominal region, according to researchers. Another bonus: A Swedish study found that eating dairy foods may cut the risk of heart attack by up to 38 percent. Finally, pouring on the milk helps because liquid takes up a lot of space in your stomach and helps you avoid all-out brownie binges.

INCLUDES:

Fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Whole milk and frozen yogurt

Instant Oatmeal

ONE OF THE CHANGES you'll make with the Abs Diet involves what you do with your spoon. Out: ice cream, pudding, and Froot Loops. In: oatmeal and high-bran cereal. When Harvard researchers analyzed diets of more than 27,000 men over 8 years, they found that guys who ate one serving of whole-grain foods daily weighed 2.5 pounds less than those who ate only refined grains. Oatmeal contains soluble fiber, so it stays in your stomach for a long time, attracting fluid. And when there's no room for other food, there's no desire for it. Oatmeal—especially when you cook it with low-fat milk and top it off with berries—is one of the fastest, best, and tastiest ways to add fiber to your diet, and a daily bowl of it may keep off the pounds.

INCLUDES:

Unsweetened and unflavored oatmeal

High-fiber cereals

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Cereals with added sugar or high-fructose corn syrup

Eggs

YOU WASTED PLENTY OF THEM on Old Man Miller's house on Mischief Night, but no more. Once thought of as a no-no food because of a link to cholesterol, eggs have shed the reputation of being a nutritional nightmare. Actually, they're a great source of protein, and having them for breakfast sets you up for a perfect day of eating. Saint Louis University researchers found that people who eat eggs for breakfast consume fewer calories the rest of the day than those who skip eggs. In the study, people were given one of two breakfasts: two scrambled eggs, two slices of toast, and a tablespoon of reduced-calorie fruit spread; or a bagel, 2 tablespoons of cream cheese, and 3 ounces of nonfat yogurt. Even though the breakfasts were equal in calories, the egg eaters ate 264 fewer calories by the end of the day. Here's a trick: Nuke a whisked egg in a coffee

mug. When it's cooked (in less than a minute), it'll fit perfectly on a whole-grain English muffin.

INCLUDES:

Eggs

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Omelets made with high-fat cheese and even higher-fat bacon

Turkey and Other Lean Meats

MEAT MAY BE A NICKNAME for a softball player, bouncer, or muscular dunce, but it also refers to one of the pillars of the Power 12. Turkey and other lean meats provide the best sources of protein, allowing you to build the all-important muscle that will help you burn calories and fat. They'll satisfy you and keep you lean: Scientists at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, found that eating more protein may reduce the fat around your midsection. People who ate 20 more grams of protein every day than the group average had 6 percent lower waist-to-hip ratios. Most people in the study made small adjustments, such as replacing $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of rice with half a chicken breast. I recommend that you work lean meats into all of your meals—plus a snack. Try a slice of Canadian bacon with eggs in the morning, grilled chicken on a lunchtime salad, and a piece of fish or lean meat for dinner. Snack on a slice or two of deli turkey or a small can of tuna and a glass of low-fat milk.

INCLUDES:

Lean steak, fish, turkey, and chicken

Shellfish

Canadian bacon

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Sausage

Bacon

Fatty cuts of steak (like rib eye and T-bone)

Peanut Butter (All-Natural, Sugar Free)

PARTLY THANKS TO a certain Reese's product, peanut butter has—for as long as I can remember—been portrayed as being as evil as an Anthony Hopkins character. While it's true that PB has a lot of calories and fat, what's more important is that it contains healthy fat to help keep you full and your arteries clean. One reason I especially like PB: It satisfies those guilty tastebuds of yours—the ones that crave food that *feels* bad for you. In fact, you should be integrating PB into your meals—just avoid the high-sugar versions, and don't bathe in the stuff. I like dropping a teaspoon or two into a blender when I'm making smoothies. I also recommend the ultimate PB&J: all-natural PB and berries on whole-grain bread.

INCLUDES:

All-natural, sugar-free peanut, almond, and cashew butters

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Mass-produced sugary, trans-fatty peanut butter

Olive Oil

FOR A LONG TIME, Americans embraced low-fat diets as enthusiastically as they've embraced reality TV, equating a low-fat diet with a low-fat body. But nutritional researchers quickly realized that people were much more successful with weight loss and weight control when they included healthy fats in their diets. Healthy fats like olive oil control cravings and keep dieters from eating lots of calories later in the day (they offer artery-clearing benefits, too). While I don't recommend drinking the stuff by the glass, do use olive oil in salad dressings, as a vegetable dip, and for cooking lean meats.

INCLUDES:

Olive, canola, peanut, and sesame oils

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Vegetable and hydrogenated vegetable oils

Trans fatty acids

Margarine

Whole-Grain Breads and Cereals

THOSE IN-THE-BASKET BREADS served at restaurants equal instant blubber. That's because breads, bagels, and many bakery products are made with refined flour—that is, flour that's stripped of all the good and healthy parts of a grain. But that doesn't mean that all breads and cereals are naughtier than certain beauty pageant title-holders. Whole-grain breads and cereals contain the good parts, providing fiber and many disease-fighting nutrients. Plus, whole grains serve as important heart protectors. The more whole grains you eat, the less likely you are to develop arterial inflammation. In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study of more than 13,000 people, those who ate nine servings of whole grains a day were 30 percent less likely to have high levels of inflammation than those who consumed three or fewer servings. One caution: A lot of marketing lingo is misleading. The only way to ensure that you're getting all good stuff and no refined stuff is to make sure your labels say "100 percent" whole wheat or whole grain.

INCLUDES:

100 percent whole-grain or whole-wheat breads, cereals, and pastas

Brown rice

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Processed carbohydrates like white breads, bagels, and doughnuts

Imposter products labeled only "wheat"

Extra-Protein (Whey) Powder

LITTLE MISS MUFFETT knew what she was doing. To add more protein into your diet, add a scoop of whey protein powder to a smoothie or a glass of milk. Whey protein—a type of animal protein—contains the essential amino acids to build muscle and burn fat. It also serves as the basis for the perfect postworkout snack. Slurping down a whey-protein shake after exercising builds calorie-burning muscle. It helps prevent overeating, too. In a University of Toronto study, men who had a whey-protein shake 2 hours before hitting a buffet ate 200 fewer calories than those who had soy- or egg-based protein shakes. Blend together low-fat milk, ice, chocolate whey powder, a banana, and a few berries.

INCLUDES:

Whey powder

Ricotta cheese (contains whey protein)

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Soy protein

Raspberries and Other Berries

I COULD SIT HERE and spout off about all of the health benefits of berries and other fruits—lots of fiber, lots of vitamins, lots of cancer-fighting nutrients—but I'm pretty sure you're well aware that fruit equals firepower. Studies even show that some fruits—like apples and grapefruit—contain a type of fiber called pectin, which has been shown to have satiating effects for up to 4 hours. Your job: Add them in wherever you can—to smoothies, in oatmeal and cereal, as part of snacks.

INCLUDES:

Berries and all fruits, especially apples and grapefruit

DOESN'T INCLUDE:

Jelly, which eliminates fiber and adds sugar