

# 10 (painless) ways to upgrade your diet

You don't eat poorly. You can just eat better. Below, 10 easy ways to do it.

by adam baer photographs by kenji toma

## 1 | **Eat: Shiitakes and Maitakes Instead of Button Mushrooms**

**Why:** You'll lower your blood pressure and cholesterol. Nutritionally speaking, earthy-flavored shiitakes and maitakes are to button mushrooms as whole grain is to Wonder bread. A growing body of research links the Japanese fungi, which are packed with antioxidants and laced with selenium, to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, anti-tumor activity, and possibly better prostate health, says Donald Abrams, MD, director of clinical programs at the University of California at San Francisco's Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. Buttons, as well as criminis and portobellos (which are the same species), don't have these benefits.

**How:** Chad S. Luethje, executive chef at Red Mountain Spa, in St.

George, Utah, has two favorite recipes: The easiest—sautéed mushrooms with truffle oil—takes 5 minutes: Slice and cook 1 lb. shiitakes and maitakes (also known as hen of the woods) for a few minutes over medium heat with 1 Tbsp. olive oil and 1/2 cup chopped chives. Add a splash of white truffle oil once it's hot and serve. More ambitious, but still straightforward, is his 10-minute mushroom broth: Simmer 1 pint vegetable stock while you're sautéing 1 lb. of chopped mushrooms and 1/4 cup diced leeks. Add the stock to the veggies when they're soft. Simmer for 5 minutes more, add a splash of white truffle oil, and serve.

## 2 | **Eat: Grass-Fed Beef Instead of Corn-Fed Beef**

**Why:** You'll shrink your belly fat. Now you can have your red meat and eat it too. The fact that grass-fed beef is leaner and contains

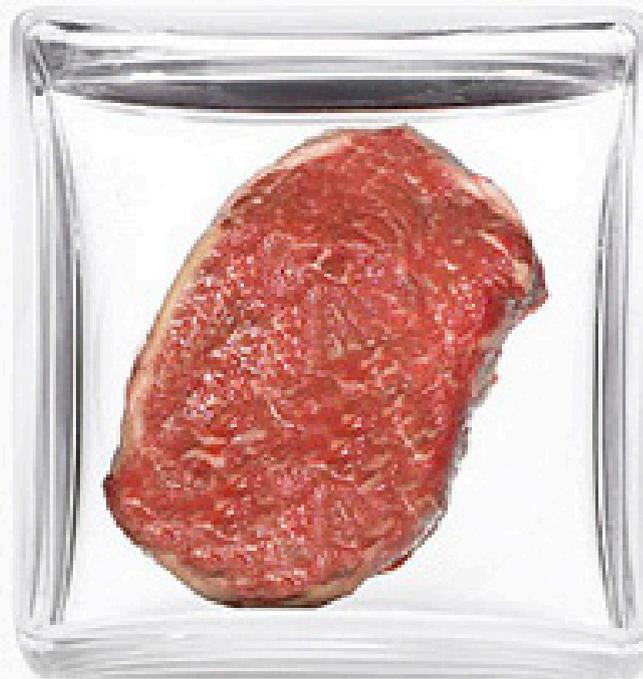
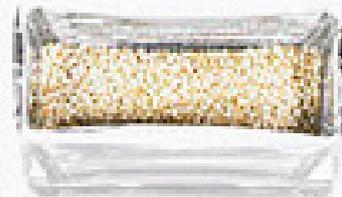
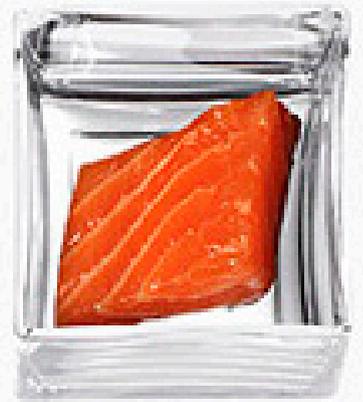
fewer hormones and antibiotics than regular beef is reason enough to upgrade. But what seals the deal is that grass-fed beef contains more conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which has been shown to reduce abdominal fat while building lean muscle. What's more, the ratio of detrimental omega-6 fatty acids to beneficial omega-3 fatty acids in grass-fed beef is about half that of corn-fed beef, says registered dietitian Susan Bowerman, assistant director of UCLA's Center for Human Nutrition. That's important because omega-6s can cause inflammation, increasing risk for heart disease and cancer.

**How:** Cook and slice a roast, and you will have leftovers you can keep in the freezer for quick sandwich fillers, says Laurie Erickson, wellness chef at coastal Georgia's Sea Island Spa. "Put a slab of beef in a roasting pan,

sprinkle it with salt and pepper, and cook at 350°F or 400°F until the meat thermometer reads 120°F for medium rare," she says. "But be aware that there isn't a lot of fat in grass-fed beef, so it's going to become dry if you overcook it." Another option is to use ground grass-fed sirloin in your regular meatloaf recipe or in burgers or bolognese sauce. If you can't find grass-fed beef in your supermarket, check out [lacensebeef.com](http://lacensebeef.com) or [americangrassfedbeef.com](http://americangrassfedbeef.com).

## 3 | **Eat: Red Lentils Instead of Mashed Potatoes**

**Why:** You'll stay slim and ward off diabetes. Despite their diminutive size, red lentils out-punch potatoes in three key nutritional ways: "They're packed with much more protein and fiber," says registered dietitian Stacy Kennedy, senior clinical nutritionist at Harvard's Dana Farber Cancer Center.



**BONUS:** Most Americans are turned off by fishy fish, but Spanish or Atlantic mackerel is becoming popular because it is so rich in omega-3s. It has close to double the amount of wild salmon. "I cook mackerel in a Japanese fashion," says chef Lee Gross. Season with coarse sea salt and cook over a very hot grill or grill pan until the skin is blistered and crisp and the flesh is cooked through. Transfer to a plate and drizzle with fresh lemon juice and a splash of good soy sauce or tamari. Eat the fish with a bit of grated daikon radish mixed with fresh grated gingerroot. The daikon and ginger help to cut the oiliness of the mackerel and temper its fishiness." Another option is to bathe the mackerel in a soy glaze. Sear it in a pan for 2 minutes and finish it in the oven for another 2 minutes. To make the glaze, put ½ cup low-sodium soy sauce and ½ cup sugar in a sauce pan and reduce it down by half over a medium flame. Brush the glaze onto the mackerel's flesh with a pastry brush before you finish it in the oven.

**EAT OUTSIDE THE BOX** Men tend to eat the same foods over and over, but small diet changes can have big effects.

That's important, but it's not their greatest strength. As men hit their 40s, says Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of the program in integrative medicine at the University of Arizona, they can develop metabolic syndrome: hypertension, obesity, and even diabetes. Eating high-glycemic carbohydrates, such as potatoes, can lead to this predicament. Lentils, however, are absorbed much more slowly and have less of an impact on blood sugar.

**How:** "I would take this in an Indian mash direction," says Lee Gross, formerly Gwyneth Paltrow's personal chef and now the executive chef at Los Angeles's macrobiotic M. Café de Chaya. "Heat a few tablespoons of olive oil in a saucepan. Throw in 1 tsp. cumin seeds, 2 bay leaves, half a cinnamon stick, and ¼ tsp. black mustard seeds. Fry the spices until they begin to pop. Add 3 Tbsp. minced ginger and a few cloves of minced garlic, along with 1 tsp. curry powder, then fry for 1 minute. Add 1 cup rinsed and dried red lentils. Then add 2 cups vegetable broth, chicken broth, or water. Bring it to a boil and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes until the lentils dissolve. You may substitute an Ethiopian berber spice blend of coriander, onion, chiles, ginger, and paprika." Refrigerate leftovers and eat it as a dip the next day.

#### 4 | **Drink Pomegranate Juice Instead of Orange Juice**

**Why:** You'll supercharge your vitamin intake. Criticizing vitamin C-rich OJ is like taking a shot at Alan Greenspan's economic policy. But the truth is, pomegranate juice has a greater disease-preventing capacity because of its off-the-charts antioxidant content. "It also looks like pomegranates have the ability to reduce the risk of developing certain cancers, including prostate cancer," says Bowerman. Drinking 100 percent juice may actually be better than eating a pomegranate, she says, because the juice is squeezed

from the whole fruit, so you get the nutrients from the seeds as well as from the peel, which is packed with phytochemicals.

**How:** "I like mixing 4 oz. 100 percent pomegranate juice concentrate with sparkling water," says Erickson. "Add a twist of lime for freshness." The concentrate has a lot less sugar than regular juice and more flavor, she says. Die-hard OJ lovers can mix pomegranate concentrate with their morning juice. You can also use pomegranate concentrate to deglaze sautéed chicken and pork dishes: Simply add 4 to 6 oz. to the pan after cooking and stir. Concentrates are available online at health-food sites such as brownwoodacres.com and dynamichealth.com.

#### 5 | **Eat Wild Salmon Instead of Albacore Tuna**

**Why:** You'll protect your brain. Wild sockeye or red salmon beats out albacore tuna for two reasons, both of which are related to what it eats: plankton, rather than other fish or cornmeal. It has 1.25 grams of omega-3s per 100 grams, which is 30 percent more than albacore, and it has 90 percent less mercury, according to the FDA. (To check the mercury count of other fish, go to gotmercury.org.) Omega-3 fatty acids are a natural anti-inflammatory, which is beneficial for cholesterol, brain health, and reducing the risk of many chronic diseases. Sockeye cannot be farmed and is always wild. It's a good choice whether it's canned, fresh, frozen, or smoked, says Andrew Weil, MD.

**How:** "Green-tea poached wild salmon is quick and easy," says Luethje. "For four servings, make

4½ cups of strong tea and use it as poaching liquid. Add the juice of 1½ lemons as well as the lemon zest. Put the liquid in a pan and submerge four 4-oz. fillets of fish. Poach for 7 minutes (at just below a simmer). Then chill the salmon, and serve over sautéed kale. Another upgrade is to use canned wild salmon in place of tuna. Combine a can of wild salmon with a dollop of Dijon mustard and some chopped dill and parsley in sandwiches; use it in a quickie whole-wheat pasta salad, or mix it into whole-wheat mac and cheese.

#### 6 | **Eat Quinoa Instead of Pasta**

**Why:** You'll pack on more muscle. Pronounced "KEE-nwah," this Incan seed is the rare high-in-fiber whole grain that is easy to cook. Fiber's importance goes beyond regulating digestion: It also reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes. "Quinoa has significantly more fiber than pasta, plus it's rich in iron and protein," says Bowerman. "And it takes only 15 minutes to prepare." Its chemical content also intrigues nutritionists. "It's high in lysine and rich in methionine, amino acids that are in short supply in soy protein and vegetable protein," she says.

**How:** To cook it, boil 1 cup quinoa to 2 cups water. It fluffs up when it's done. Maria Hines, chef and owner of Tilth, an acclaimed organic restaurant in Seattle, favors a simple herbed quinoa dish. Boil the quinoa. In a separate skillet, add 1 Tbsp. olive oil and sauté 2 cloves chopped garlic, 2 shallots, the juice of half a lemon, ½ cup fresh chives, and ½ cup basil. When the garlic starts to brown, add the quinoa and stir for 2 minutes; serve. Quinoa is also a good base for salads,

says Luethje. He combines 1 cup chilled quinoa (sometimes cooked in chicken broth to add flavor) with 1 cup grilled marinated vegetables or grilled chicken breast, and ¼ cup black beans or garbanzos. He tops it with ¼ cup cotija cheese.

#### 7 | **Eat Kale Instead of Green Beans**

**Why:** You'll give your poor liver a boost. Once relegated to ornamental status because of its brightly colored leaves, kale is enjoying a renaissance. A dark, leafy cruciferous vegetable in the same family as broccoli, kale is loaded with beta-carotene, vitamins C and E, calcium, and lutein, and it's extremely high in antioxidants. "Green beans are rich in fiber, but kale has a much higher concentration of phytonutrients and cancer-fighting indole-3 carbinol compounds," says Kennedy. "And it keeps the liver healthy by providing a natural detoxification, helping to regulate liver enzymes that assist in the clearing of toxins." Plus, kale has a high amount of folate, which is good for blood cells.

**How:** The knock on kale is its metallic taste, when served British-style (i.e., boiled to a pulp). Lately, though, chefs are sautéing it and using baby kale leaves, which have a buttery taste. Hines keeps her kale simple, sautéing it with 2 cloves garlic, 2 shallots, and ½ cup white wine. Sauté it until the wine evaporates, and finish with a squeeze of lemon juice and a dash of red chili flakes. Other chefs are using different kinds of kale. "Dinosaur or Tuscan kale, for instance, is delicious," says Gross, "but red Russian is my favorite." He uses it in a Thai peanut dish. Combine 3 Tbsp. soy sauce, 2 Tbsp. peanut butter, a few tablespoons of honey, 1 Tbsp. minced ginger, 1 clove minced garlic, and 1 Tbsp. crushed red chili flakes in a bowl. Mix it up, and use to dress the freshly blanched or steamed kale. Sprinkle chopped peanuts on top to serve.

**Sockeye salmon is always wild and is a good choice whether it's fresh, frozen, canned or smoked.**



**LIFE JUICE** Some liquids contain more antioxidants than the flesh of the food from which they're derived...

### 8 | Drink Green Tea Instead of Coffee

**Why:** You'll get a longer-lasting and healthier caffeine buzz. When it comes to a caffeine rush, green tea is to coffee as the tortoise is to the hare. Along with providing a gentler, more sustained buzz, green tea is easier on your heart (coffee can raise blood pressure) and stomach (coffee can cause an acid-reflux response), and it's loaded with antioxidants. "Green tea is packed with the polyphenol EGCG, which helps prevent cancer," says Dr. Abrams. No wonder you can now even find green tea at Starbucks.

**How:** Traditionally, the Japanese drink green tea—either brewed in bags or made from a potent powder called matcha—straight with no milk or sugar. Good Earth ([goodearthteas.com](http://goodearthteas.com)) makes a high-quality tea-bag blend. Recently, it has become popular to turn matcha into a hot latte or ice-blended latte. "I steam soy milk—usually Vitasoy, because it makes a rich froth—and then I brew a strong shot of matcha powder and sweeten it with agave syrup," says Gross. O-Cha is considered the premier powdered green tea ([o-cha.com](http://o-cha.com)). Do three parts milk to one part tea.

### 9 | Eat Soybeans Instead of Potato Chips

**Why:** You'll supercharge your immune system. Immunity-boosting, heart-protecting, and superfilling, soybeans prove that "healthy snack food" is not an oxymoron. "Soybeans are rich in fiber, iron, protein, and omega-3s," says Kennedy. "And they give you not only standard protein, but also plant-based protein, which is the most healthy for your immune system," she says. "It's also a complete protein, meaning it gives you all the amino acids you need to build muscle without the less desirable aspects of red

meat. What's more, soybean protein satiates you better than a carbohydrate snack, and your system absorbs the compounds slowly so you won't be susceptible to energy swings."

**How:** Steam these sweet and mildly nutty beans in a pot or in the microwave, and then salt lightly. "For a bargain, purchase them frozen in the pod," says Erickson. "Add a few drops of water and microwave on high for 5 minutes." Soybeans can also be used in dips with crudités, she says. "Combine 1½ cups canned white beans with 1½ cups cooked edamame, 2½ Tbsp. lemon juice, ¼ cup olive oil, 3 cloves garlic, and a dash of salt. Then blend it in a food processor."

### 10 | Drink Organic Red Wine Instead of Beer

**Why:** You'll protect your heart and shed pounds. A variety of research has determined that red wine has heart-protecting qualities, but a new study shows that organic domestic red wine is the best. It has the highest levels of resveratrol, which improves cardiovascular health, and very high antioxidant activity, which can help prevent cancer. "The red grapes from other countries have higher levels of pesticides," says Kennedy. "One negative aspect of pesticides is that they inhibit the plant from fully developing its own immune system, so the phytonutrients in the fruit are decreased." Nondrinkers can get these same benefits from organic domestic grape juice.

**How:** Organic red wine does not age as well as conventional wines, so it is probably wiser to drink them as soon as you can. Try merlots from northern California's Bonterra vineyard ([bonterra.com](http://bonterra.com)), and pinot noirs from Oregon's Ponzi vineyard ([ponziwines.com](http://ponziwines.com)). To find other popular vineyards, visit the Organic Wine Company ([ecowine.com](http://ecowine.com)).

**ALL-STAR PANEL** Donald Abrams, MD, director of clinical programs at the University of California at San Francisco's Osher Center for Integrative Medicine; Stacy Kennedy, a registered dietitian and senior clinical nutritionist at Harvard's Dana Farber Cancer Center; Susan Bowerman, a registered dietitian and assistant director of UCLA's Center for Human Nutrition; Andrew Weil, MD; Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of integrative medicine at the University of Arizona; Maria Hines, chef at Tilth, in Seattle, Washington; Lee Gross, chef at M. Café de Chaya, in Los Angeles; Chad Luethje, chef at Red Mountain Spa, in St. George, Utah; and Laurie Erickson, chef at Sea Island Resort, in Georgia.