

By Kristen Hampshire

# 6 Super FOODS

Add these beneficial foods to your grocery list and start eating with a mind to reverse health problems and boost vitality in the new year.

## 1: Shiitake Mushrooms

Used in Asian holistic medicine for more than 6,000 years to fight cold, influenza and infections, shiitake mushrooms are a versatile food you can pick up at most stores. "And they are way healthier for you than any of the supergrains," says Ben Bebenroth, chef and owner of Spice of Life Catering.

Interestingly, the two foods with the highest levels of antioxidants were believed to be chicken liver and wheat germ. When tested, shiitake mushrooms showed 40 times the antioxidant powers of wheat germ. "You always hear about blueberries and acai," Bebenroth says, "but shiitakes are blowing them all out of the water."

Contrary to most vegetables, when you cook shiitakes at home, the heat won't destroy a single health benefit. Simple preparations go a long way toward releasing the rich shiitake flavors. "They have so much flavor, you don't need to bury them with 20 ingredients and cover them with cheese," jokes Bebenroth, who sources his shiitakes from Tom and Wendy Wiandt of Killbuck Valley Mushrooms in Wooster (they sell locally at the Shaker Square and Crocker Park farmers markets).

Regardless of how you prepare them, you'll still gain their health benefits. They have high levels of protein (18 percent), potassium, niacin and B vitamins, calcium, magnesium and phosphorus. They naturally fight viruses, lower cholesterol and regulate blood pressure. Researchers S. Suzuki and Osamu found that a raw shiitake eaten daily for one week lowered serum cholesterol by 12 percent.

"These shiitake compounds can basically chafe down cholesterol in your system and break it apart," Bebenroth sums up. "It's a win-win ingredient."

Shiitakes also contain lentinan, an immunostimulant that has been used to treat cancer, AIDS, diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibrocystic breast disease and other diseases.

"In its concentrated form, it was given to cancer patients and was shown to weaken tumors and break them up — quite a remarkable property," Bebenroth comments.

### Shiitake Mushrooms and Scrambled Eggs

Serves 2-3

- ½ pound shiitake mushrooms, stems removed
- 1½ ounces unsalted butter
- 4 to 6 local organic eggs
- 2 ounces feta cheese
- salt and pepper to taste
- chopped parsley, garnish

Cut shiitake into strips (Julienne) and saute in hot skillet with butter, salt and pepper. Allow slight browning. Add eggs and break the yolks with a fork. Cook one minute, then stir. Add feta and continue to cook until eggs are not runny. Serve on a platter garnished with chopped parsley.

(Recipe from Ben Bebenroth, chef/owner, Spice of Life Catering)