

Healthy store cupboard essentials

Even for the most organised of us, there are always going to be days when you open the food cupboards in your kitchen and there is absolutely nothing to eat. To save you a quick dash to the shops, why not stock up your food cupboards or pantry with lots of convenient healthy foods that can be quickly assembled to make a nutritious meal or delicious snack.

1. **Vegetable oils** (such as rapeseed, olive, sunflower, soya, peanut and sesame oils). Rich in 'good' unsaturated fats. Great for cooking or simply drizzling over your salad and vegetables but like all oils and fats, they are high in calories so use sparingly when watching your weight.
2. **Dried herbs and spices**. Get a decent stash to add flavour and spice to your food, as well as help you to ease up on the salt cellar.
3. **Tinned tomatoes and tomato sauce**. Packed full of the red pigment lycopene. Surprisingly tomatoes that have been processed are an even better source of this powerful antioxidant than the fresh variety. Chopped tomatoes are also immensely versatile and can add colour, flavour and texture to almost any dish.
4. **Tinned salmon** (not tinned tuna). Like all oily fish, salmon is a good source of heart healthy omega 3 polyunsaturated fats. Great for a quick snack on wholemeal toast or in your lunchtime sandwiches and it also counts towards one of your recommended portions of oily fish a week.
5. **Honey**. A natural source of sugar. Honey can add a touch of sweetness to any meal.
6. **Dark chocolate**. Good news if you are a bit of a chocoholic. It will not only help to satisfy your chocolate craving, but you will get an antioxidant boost, as dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids) is rich in flavonoids. Not too many squares though, as it is still high in fat and calories, which could be bad news for your waistline.
7. **Wholegrain pasta, noodles, bulgar wheat, pearl barley and brown rice**. These have a lower Glycaemic Index than plain varieties and a good source of slow release carbohydrate, making you feel fuller for longer whilst helping avoid the highs and lows in your blood sugar. A great staple that can be added to so many dishes.
8. **Canned beans and pulses**. Baked beans, lentils, borlotti beans, butter beans, black beans, chickpeas. Packed with soluble fibre, canned beans and pulses are incredibly convenient, as they

can be used straight from the can. They are also an economical way to add bulk to your family dishes and a portion counts as one of your 5-a-day. Add them to your main meals from curries to chilli, casseroles to soups, or simply have them as a snack such as baked beans on toast.

9. **Canned vegetables** (such as sweetcorn, peas, carrots etc). Contrary to what you might think, canned vegetables still count towards your 5-a-day and they may even be higher in nutrients than fresh varieties, since the vegetables are picked and processed rapidly. They are not only hugely versatile but they are not going to get forgotten about and go off at the bottom of your fridge.

10. **Canned Fruit** (such as peaches, pears, pineapple, lychees). A portion counts towards your 5-a-day. Try to choose canned fruit packed in its own juice or in water, instead of syrup, which adds lots of 'empty' sugar calories.

11. **Green tea**. One of the highest antioxidant rich teas available. Try swapping a couple of cups of your English breakfast for a mug of green tea for a healthy refreshing drink.

12. **Canned soup**. A fantastic store cupboard staple for keeping you warm on a winter's evening or for a simple lunch with wholemeal bread. Use your new found food labelling knowledge to check the amount of salt and sugar in some of the varieties, as although many food companies are trying to reduce the amounts used, they can still be quite high.

13. **Peanut butter**. An American staple, and a known high calorie food. Yet it has many health benefits being full of good unsaturated fat and a great source of protein and fibre to help keep you staying fuller for longer. Can be enjoyed traditionally as a peanut butter and jam sandwich, or added as a nutritious ingredient to many dishes.

14. **Pitted olives**. Olives are an excellent source of good monounsaturated fat and vitamin E and are a key part of the well regarded Mediterranean diet. Drain well if they are jarred in brine, as it adds to the salt content of your diet. Sprinkle over your salad or pizza or use as an ingredient in your dishes. Not too many, as they are high in fat (even though it's 'good' fat).

15. **Dried fruit** (raisins, sultanas, figs, dates and prunes). A great snack food if you crave something sweet and you've run out of fresh fruit as they can be stored for months. They are also good for baking or adding to your cereal, an easy way to boost your fruit intake. One heaped tablespoon (or around 30g) counts towards your 5-a-day. Once again, be careful not to eat too many as they are higher in sugar and calories than fresh fruit.

16. **Nuts and seeds.** Nuts like pistachios, cashew, almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, brazil nuts, unsalted peanuts etc. Seeds such as linseeds (flaxseeds), sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds. Each brimming with an array of nutrients and essential fats, they can be used as a snack or tossed over your breakfast cereal and salads or used in baking. They are high in calories, so if you want to enjoy their nutritional benefits without worrying about weight gain, only eat them in moderation and limit your intake to 25g/1oz a day.

17. **Wholegrain/ High fibre breakfast cereals** (Weetabix, All-Bran Flakes, Natural Muesli, Shredded Wheat etc.) and porridge oats. A great way to start the day and help you achieve the recommended 25g fibre a day. These high-fibre foods will help keep you feeling fuller for longer and help to prevent weight gain by controlling your mid-morning munchies.

18. **Long life milk.** Long life milk and UHT milk have the same nutritional values as ordinary milk; they have just been treated differently so they last longer. Opt for lower fat varieties where possible. A 200ml glass of milk simply drunk or poured over your breakfast cereal is one of the easiest ways to help you on your way to achieving your daily calcium requirement.