


Chapter 8


Superfoods or Hype: Decoding the Wellness Trend and Disease Cure

Bhupinder Singh

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4779-2553>


Sharda University, India

Saurabh Chandra

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4172-9968>


Bennett University, Greater Noida, India

Arunima Shastri

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6260-1253>

Christ University, Bangalore, India

Liza Shoor

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0085-3255>

Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India

ABSTRACT

Superfoods have become a buzzword in the wellness world foods that can be marketed as particularly nutrient-dense and possessing extraordinary health and even disease-cure properties. Foods like these are revered for their concentrated doses of vitamins, antioxidants and essential fatty acids. Some of these claims are backed by scientific studies, supporting the notion that these foods can help reduce inflammation, lower the risk of chronic diseases and support overall well-being. For example, curcumin found in turmeric is associated with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, and omega-3 fatty acids in chia seeds contribute to heart health. Consumers should remain critical of marketing claims and be guided by the science when adding superfoods to their wellness regimens. Biological plausibility

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and population-based studies are not sufficient, alone, to establish the validity of disease prevention and health promotion functions for foods towards disease prevention and health promotion.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Superfoods” tend to straddle the grey area between evidence-based nutrition and marketing hype. There are some claims made by the wellness industry and foods that seem to be miracle cure-all for every ailment, while completely disregarding the root of this with a balanced diet and lifestyle. Reliance on costly superfoods contributes to the social and economic inequalities in access to nutrition. Other critics note that plenty of common, inexpensive foods, like lentils, spinach and apples, provide similar health benefits minus the markup. Caution, transparency and application of the scientific method in research, education, and marketing practices will ensure that the superfoods trend is not a case of all hype and no benefit (Yadav & Yadav, 2024). The word “super foods” has achieved a lot of popularity in the last several years, implying that it is nature’s miracle ingredient to prevent diseases, prolong life and improve well-being. From antioxidant-packed berries and nutrient-rich leafy greens to omega-3-loaded seeds and rare plant powders, prebiotics and probiotics, superfoods have been marketed as must-have dietary staples for maximum health. While quite a few of these foods are indeed health delivering, their claims tend to be overblown, driven more by marketing than sound science. For example, blueberries are often cited as a brain-healthy superfood thanks to their abundant flavonoids, but their potential effect on cognitive function is less novel than a foundation of a vibrant cardiovascular diet. So too turmeric and its active compound curcumin both which are pushed for anti-inflammatory properties but when ingested by humans their absorption is very limited, meaning humans need specific formulations or need to consume them with other ingredients such as black pepper in order for any effect to occur.

While there’s an emerging body of evidence that suggests nutrient-rich foods contribute to disease prevention, there’s still a heated debate surrounding the suggestion that superfoods themselves are leagues beyond a regular balanced diet. The idea that a handful of pricey, fashionable ingredients make up for an unhealthy lifestyle otherwise is an illusion promoted by the wellness industry. For chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes, research suggests that overall diet is a stronger determinant than individual foods. Moreover, even the popularization of superfoods has raised ethical and ecological issues when the native plants turned into entrepreneurial products, such as quinoa and acai, for instance, which, as witnessed, have tripled or quadrupled their price in the Americas because of growing

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