12 OF THE HOTTEST POWER COUPLES

Want more protection against skin cancer? Drink coffee before a workout ... Trying to build muscle? Stretch between sets ... Hoping to reduce your risk of stroke? Squeeze a little lemon into your green tea.

Though seemingly random, these unusual combinations highlight the latest findings from the emerging practice called “synergistic medicine,” which pairs health boosting strategies from fields as divergent as kinesiology, neuroscience and dermatology — with truly outstanding results.

Here, we have rounded up 12 of the best dynamic duos for knocking out memory loss, fatigue, disease, weight gain and more.

Flush Fat
Burger + Frozen yogurt

The next time you eat a food high in saturated fat, follow it with a low-fat, calcium-rich dessert. Calcium binds to fatty acids in the digestive tract, blocking their absorption.

In one study, participants who ate 1,735 mg of calcium from low-fat dairy products (about as much as in five 8-ounce glasses of fat-free milk) blocked the equivalent of 85 calories a day.

**Beef up calcium:** Researchers haven’t determined exactly how much calcium you should consume with each high-fat meal. But by including a glass of fat-free or soy milk or a fortified juice with a fatty meal, you may get a boost if you’re trying to lose weight.

Sidestep skin cancer
Caffeine + cardio

Research shows that caffeine and exercise both have anticancer properties. Combined, they offer powerful protection against skin cancer.

In research on animals exposed to UVB radiation, Rutgers University scientists learned the pairing increased the animals’ ability to destroy skin cancer cells by up to 4 times. Allan H. Conney, PhD, the director of the laboratory for cancer research at the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy at Rutgers, suspects that caffeine inhibits ATR-1, a genetic pathway that prevents damaged cells from self-destructing. Both caffeine and exercise also decrease tissue fat, which research shows helps cells deconstruct.

**Have a cup, then walk:** Drink a strong cup of coffee an hour before exercise. (If your blood pressure is elevated, skip the caffeine.) Caffeine can also increase endurance and delay fatigue—helping you walk longer and stronger. Just don’t forget the sunscreen.

Fight Fatigue
Eggs + Orange Juice

If you don’t eat much meat, you may be feeling sluggish because you’re not getting enough iron. Reason: Your body can readily absorb iron from meat, but only 2 to 20% of the nonheme iron found in veggies, beans, and eggs makes it into your bloodstream. An effective booster: vitamin C. It’s the most potent promoter of nonheme iron absorption. Vitamin C keeps the iron up to 6
times more soluble—meaning your body can now use 100% of the nonheme iron you eat and stave off fatigue-causing anemia.

“C” that you get more iron: Wash down your morning omelet with a glass of C-rich orange juice. Or toss iron-rich tofu and C-dense broccoli into your salad. Keep the cooking to a minimum (or at low temperatures) and cut your produce into thick chunks. Vitamin C is easily destroyed by light, heat, and air.

**Protect Your Heart**
**Green tea + Lemon**

In a study of more than 40,500 Japanese men and women, those who drank five or more cups of green tea every day had the lowest risk of dying of heart disease and stroke. Researchers attribute the protective effect to catechins, powerful antioxidants.

Trouble is, less than 20% of these relatively unstable compounds survive digestion. To get more out of every cup, squeeze in some lemon juice. The vitamin C in lemons helps your body absorb 13 times more catechins than it can obtain from plain tea alone, according to a Purdue University study.

**Sip to your heart’s content:** With the catechin boost from vitamin C, you can help your heart by drinking just one or two cups daily. If lemons make you pucker, squeeze in some orange, lime, or grapefruit juice; they increase antioxidant absorption, too, though to a lesser extent. Just skip the milk—it actually interferes with absorption—and stick to freshly brewed tea, hot or iced. The catechins in ready-to-drink bottles are ineffective.

**Boost Brainpower**
**Exercise + Music**

Researchers believe exercise boosts cognitive performance by stimulating the central nervous system, and the addition of music may help organize thoughts.

21 minutes of exercise is all it took to lift the moods of cardiac rehabilitation patients in an Ohio State University pilot study. But when participants listened to Antonio Vivaldi’s Four Seasons on headphones, they performed significantly better on a verbal fluency test afterward.

**Move and groove:** Though researchers haven’t explored whether these findings can be generalized to apply to healthy adults, it can’t hurt to exercise with your MP3 player. Stick to the same routine the study participants followed—gradually increase the slope and speed on your treadmill every 10 minutes until you can speak only in short sentences (walk for a minimum of 21 minutes). And listen to the music of your choice; any genre should work just as effectively as classical.

**Rev Immunity**
**Pot roast + Carrots**

This popular comfort food makes you feel good for a reason. Carrots are chock-full of vitamin A, a retinol that plays a key role in preventing and fighting off infections. But without the zinc in the beef, your body wouldn’t be able to use it.
Vitamin A can travel through the blood only when it’s bound to a protein. And zinc is required to make that retinol-binding protein. So if you don’t have enough zinc, vitamin A is not going to move from the liver to the tissues, where it does its job.

**Germ-fighting combos:** Dark orange, yellow, red, and green fruits and vegetables are good sources of vitamin A. For a little lighter fare, pair them with zinc-rich proteins: Slice fresh mango into low-fat yogurt, eat a small sweet potato with your fish, or stuff your chicken with spinach, Florentine-style.

**Save Your Eyesight**  
**salad + avocado**

Spinach may be good for your eyes, but avocado makes it even more effective.

Researchers at the University of Ohio found that when adults ate a lettuce, spinach, and carrot salad with or without 3 tablespoons of avocado, the avocado eaters absorbed 8.3 times more alpha-carotene, 13.6 times more beta-carotene, and 4.3 times more lutein than the others.

Researchers believe the healthy fats in avocado increase the absorption of these fat-soluble carotenoids, which are associated with a decreased risk of macular degeneration and cataracts.

**Go green:** In the study, 3 tablespoons of avocado was nearly as effective as 6, so spare yourself the extra calories. Use a Hass avocado if possible—it has a higher monounsaturated fat content—or try swapping in another healthy fat source, such as safflower oil, nuts, or olives.

**Build Muscle**  
**strength-train + stretch**

Fast-track your strength gains by adding static stretching—in which you hold a stretch for 10 to 30 seconds—to your routine.

Weight-training builds strength by causing tiny tears in the muscle, which then quickly repairs itself, ending up bigger and stronger. Three studies led by Prevention advisor Wayne L. Westcott, PhD, found that adults who stretched either between or immediately after strength-training exercises developed about 20% more strength than those who only lifted weights.

**Lift and Reach:** Rest at least a minute between sets and use that time to stretch the muscle you’ve just worked. For instance, if you just did leg extensions, stretch your quadriceps by pulling your right ankle toward your butt while standing on your left leg. Hold each stretch for 20 seconds.

**Bolster Your Memory**  
**curcumin + black pepper**

Curcumin may be known for its anticancer properties, but this compound (found in the spice turmeric) is also making waves in Alzheimer’s disease research.

A recent study found that, compared with those who got a placebo, Alzheimer’s patients who took 1 g of curcumin either as a supplement or mixed with food reduced the buildup of plaque in their brains. However, curcumin tends to be poorly absorbed, so you’ll need to mix it with black pepper to increase its absorption up to 2,000%.
Spice up your palate: Turmeric has been used for centuries in Indian curries but may taste strong to an American palate. Start with 1/2 teaspoon daily. Once you get used to the flavor, mix it with black pepper to make a great rub for fish or chicken.

Avoid Metabolic Syndrome
The Mediterranean diet + nuts

A Mediterranean-style diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, beans, fish, olive oil, and grains, is associated with everything from weight loss to a reduced risk of Parkinson’s and heart disease. Now, new research shows that people with metabolic syndrome—a condition characterized by high cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar and excess belly fat—can reduce these symptoms by adding an extra serving of mixed nuts to the healthful regimen.

In a large study, Spanish researchers instructed people at high risk of heart disease to follow the diet with slight variations. Among the group that added 30 g of nuts, the incidence of metabolic syndrome decreased about 14% within a year (as opposed to, say, a 6.7% decline in those who added a little more olive oil).

Researchers believe the fiber, potassium, magnesium, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids in the nuts helped regulate insulin, blood pressure, and inflammation.

Healthy snack attack: Participants in the study ate about five walnuts, five hazelnuts, and five almonds daily. Kathy McManus, RD, director of the department of nutrition at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, recommends eating the same amount (approximately 1 ounce) to take the edge off late-afternoon hunger. Sprinkle the mixture over Mediterranean diet–friendly yogurt, hot oatmeal, or a small salad.

Banish Breakouts
Retinoid + benzoyl peroxide

When researchers combined adapalene, a retinoid that reduces inflammation, with benzoyl peroxide, which kills the bacteria that cause acne, study participants’ acne improved on average by more than 50% in 12 weeks—about 15% better than with either ingredient alone.

This new combination therapy targets three out of four causes of acne.

The right regimen: Ask your doc about Epiduo, the first FDA-approved acne product to combine adapalene (0.1%) and benzoyl peroxide (2.5%). Thiboutot recommends washing before bed with a gentle cleanser, waiting about 20 minutes, and then applying the gel, followed by a moisturizer. Epiduo can be drying; any initial irritation should subside within 2 weeks. If you’d like to try an OTC treatment, wash in the morning with a cleanser that contains benzoyl peroxide—we like PCA Skin pHaze 31 BPO 5% Cleanser ($21.50; dermstore.com). At night apply a serum containing retinol, such as Neova Retinol ME 0.15% ($40; beautybridge.com). Retinols are milder versions of Rx retinoids.

Ward Off Heart Disease
PLAC test + HSCRP test

These tests measure Lp-PLA2 and CRP levels, two important markers of the kind of inflammation caused by the accumulation of plaque in your arteries—a big predictor of heart disease. When
doctors added the results of these screenings to their usual assessment of risk factors (blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.), they ended up reclassifying 39% of intermediate-risk patients—including 11% who were in need of more serious treatment—reports a new study published in the journal Stroke. Many of these patients may now be candidates for statins.

**Get the tests if:** You're middle-aged and your cholesterol is normal but you smoke, have gained weight, have a family history of heart disease, or have borderline hypertension. If you do get put into a higher-risk category, statins aren’t the only treatment. Lp-PLA2 and CRP levels both respond well to diet and exercise.