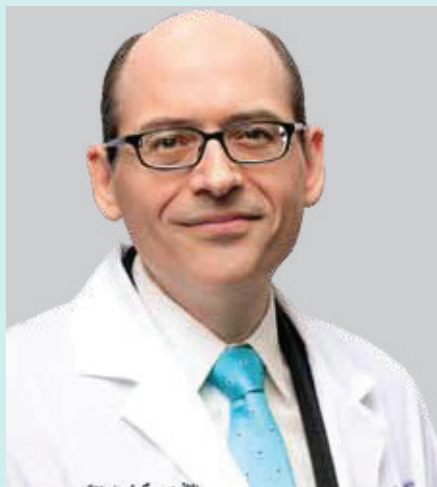
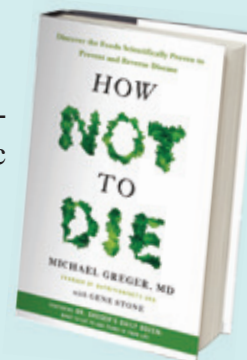


# An Interview with Michael Greger, M.D., F.A.C.L.M.

by Mark Huberman



**Michael Greger, M.D., F.A.C.L.M.**, is a licensed general practitioner specializing in clinical nutrition, and an internationally recognized speaker on a number of important public health issues. He has testified before Congress; has appeared on shows such as *The Colbert Report* and *The Dr. Oz Show*; and was invited as an expert witness in defense of Oprah Winfrey at the infamous 1998



“meat defamation” trial. His latest books, *How Not to Die* and *The How Not to Die Cookbook*, became instant New York Times Best Sellers. Dr. Greger is a founding member and Fellow of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. He is honored to

teach part of T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D.’s esteemed nutrition course at Cornell University. Dr. Greger is a graduate of the Cornell University School of Agriculture and the Tufts University School of Medicine. His nutrition work can be found at NutritionFacts.org, a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit charity.

## Growing up in Miami, Florida, were your parents health conscious?

Not at all, but I am pleased to report that today my whole family is following this lifestyle.

## My late father, Max, used to say, “Most people don’t start thinking about their health until after they’ve lost it.” Was this the case for you?

Fortunately, no, but a health crisis experienced by my

Grandma Frances did have a profound influence on me. When I was just a kid, she was diagnosed with end-stage heart disease and sent home to die. She had had so many bypass surgeries that her life was nearly over at age 65. However, as chance would have it, she had watched an episode of *60 Minutes* that featured Nathan Pritikin, who ran a clinic in California and claimed that he could help people regain their life through diet and lifestyle changes. She decided to make the cross-country trip to see him, and ended up making a remarkable recovery. After a few weeks, she was walking 10 miles a day! She went on to live another 31 years, able to enjoy her six grandkids, including me. She became one of Pritikin’s first success stories and was featured in his biography. She was one of the persons described by saying, “They wheeled her in but she walked out!”

## Was there a single book, article, or lecture that inspired you to become a vegan?

Yes. It was July 21, 1990, when Dr. Dean Ornish published his landmark study on the impact of lifestyle in reversing heart disease in the most prestigious medical journal in the world. Heart disease was the number-one killer and he was able to reverse it without surgery or drugs. That was pretty profound for me.



Dr. Greger being interviewed by Mark Huberman in Akron, Ohio on September 22, 2018

**Why do you think his work caught your attention compared to others’?**

It just made so much sense. You’re either data driven or you’re not, right? Some people smoke cigarettes even though they know it’s bad for them. I *don’t* smoke cigarettes because I know it’s bad for me.

**When you decided to become vegan, was there also an ethical component or was it just for health reasons?**

Back then it was just health. But then once your defenses are down and you’re not participating in the meat-eating world, I think you’re more open to a more compassionate way of thinking. Early on in my adult life, I went to Farm Sanctuary, and I discovered that once you give a pig a belly rub, you really can’t go back from there!

**I understand you did your undergraduate work at Cornell. Was Dr. T. Colin Campbell teaching there at the time?**

That’s why I went to Cornell! Unfortunately, I never had him as a professor but ever since 1990, I started gobbling up everything I could find on clinical nutrition, and I have really never stopped.

**What made you choose Tufts University for medical school?**

I did so because, at the time, they had the Stern School of Nutrition and they offered more courses on nutrition than any other school in the country. However, as it turned out, even Tufts offered only 19 hours out of *thousands* of hours of preclinical research. And it wasn’t even nutrition; it was like the Krebs cycle all over again and the biochemistry of vitamins. It wasn’t clinical nutrition that I could be using to actually help people. It was ridiculous and, sadly, things are not much better today in medical schools.

**Dr. Herbert Shelton and his peers warned us about the “brainwashing of medical school education”; were you able to avoid this?**

I actually wrote a book about this called *Heart Failure* that described my time resisting the indoctrination. It’s free online if anyone’s interested in what I went through. [You



*Dr. Greger was inspired to go vegan after reading Dr. Dean Ornish’s landmark study on the impact of lifestyle in reversing heart disease.*

*“If I stayed in private practice or worked in a hospital I might see a couple dozen patients a day, but I wanted to reach a lot more!”*

can find *Heart Failure* here: <http://www.just-think-it.com/heartfailure.pdf>.]

**When you finished medical school did you go into private practice?**

I did my post graduate medical training at the last remaining public health hospital in Massachusetts, but then I went on the road to spread my message far and wide. If I stayed in private practice or worked in a hospital I

might see a couple dozen patients a day, but I wanted to reach a lot more! So, I began speaking wherever I could find an audience. Sometimes I was giving up to 40 talks a month. In the early days I was on the road full time, going from city to city. I had one key on my key chain and I didn’t even own a pillow! People put me up and fed me and that’s how I lived. I also started a video series, which allowed me to reach thousands of people, not just hundreds.

**How did you earn your living?**

People have always been very generous in supporting my work. I lived out of my car and didn’t own or need anything. When my car broke down, someone would donate another one. I didn’t need much more than a computer, which was donated as well.

**I know that one of your first claims to fame was being involved with the lawsuit against Oprah Winfrey. How did that come about?**

For a period of time I was involved with the Organic Consumers Association, which raised awareness about Mad Cow Disease, and I became an expert on the issue. That is what led me to be involved in the Texas lawsuit against Oprah Winfrey for “food disparagement,” a law that existed in 23 states that made it illegal to make allegedly unfounded statements about the health dangers of certain perishable food items. My role was to argue that these were indeed founded comments. But, of course, that’s not the argument we really should have made. The argument we want to make is that we have free speech and are supposed to have the right to say whatever the hell we

want! But if you can take a billionaire and wreck people's lives by dragging them through the courts, who really won? The industry won.

### Why did you go to work for the Humane Society of the United States?

Being on the road all the time became pretty miserable, and along came a nice job offer to become their Public Health Director, a position I kept for a dozen years. I did infectious disease work for them, focusing on the public health implications of Bird Flu, Mad Cow Disease, Salmonella food poisoning and other so-called zoonotic, animal-to-human diseases.

### What prompted you to leave that job?

While working for the Humane Society, I started NutritionFacts.org and that caught the attention of a donor with the Jesse and Julie Rasch Foundation of Canada. The donor called me out of the blue and said, "We want to put all your DVDs online," and I said that was awesome! The foundation also lent me one of their web experts, Christie Richards, to start the site. However, once that was established, the donor stepped back and essentially said, "You're on your own." I didn't have any money and couldn't afford to pay anyone, but the donor suggested that I put up a "Donate" button on my website. I was skeptical, but it worked incredibly well. From the response to that little donate button, we now have 15 people on staff and are reaching millions of people a month with my daily videos. It's really crazy!

### When do you ever sleep, since you somehow post new videos every day!

Until there's not a single person left who would change if they knew the truth, I feel driven to get the evidence out there so people can make truly informed decisions.

### Did you ever dream in those early days when you were on the lecture circuit with no money and no possessions that someday you would be reaching millions?

It really is funny and amazing when I look back. It all started literally with a little clipboard and a small sign-up sheet for my newsletter, and today people stop me on the street to tell me how much they enjoy what I have shared.

### Now it's a virtual clipboard!

Right! I remember when I first reached 10,000 viewers through my website videos, and now it's in the millions! I feel that I am just getting started and that there is tremendous potential for more growth. I am really excited, and

we keep hiring new people!

### It seems that everyone in the whole-food, plant-based health movement is familiar with your book *How Not to Die*, but very few recall your book *Carbophobia*.

I wrote it in response to the Atkins craze. If you remember, there was a time when millions of people were on the Atkins Diet, and I looked around and said to myself, "Someone needs to write a book about this," because it was so ridiculous. The problem was that four months after the book came out, Atkins declared bankruptcy. Of course, I played no role in that whatsoever. I just came in at the end of the wave.

### Are you amazed at how Americans pursue one diet craze after another?

Not really. Keep in mind that the current Keto Diet is just another manifestation of the Atkins Diet, and when that runs its course, there will be another that takes its place. I think it simply goes back to people just wanting to hear good news to justify their bad habits.

### It's like the H.L. Mencken observation that "History has that rotten habit of repeating itself."

Over and over where diets are concerned. People keep falling for it.

### Tell me more about your organization NutritionFacts.Org.

That's my baby. That's what I really am.



### Am I correct that you, like the NHA, accept no advertising?

Absolutely. That way we avoid the corrupting influence of commercialism. I want to be clean from all that garbage. The way I see it, even if I only accepted money from, say the Apple Board, and then I do a video on the benefits of eating apples, I wouldn't want people to wonder in the back of their minds if I'm just saying that apples are good because I got "Big Apple" money. I never want that to be the perception.

### And all of your posted videos and articles are free, right?

Yes, everything is free.

### Do you offer a "members-only" section?

No, and this is very important. There is no members-only section where, for example, you could pay a fee to

*"I feel that I am just getting started and that there is tremendous potential for more growth. I am really excited."*

have me tell you how to take care of your sick child, and if you're not a member, "too bad, bye-bye." That's outrageous to me. It is all for free, and I would never have it any other way.

### **With the thousands of nutrition videos you record, how do you not lose your voice?**

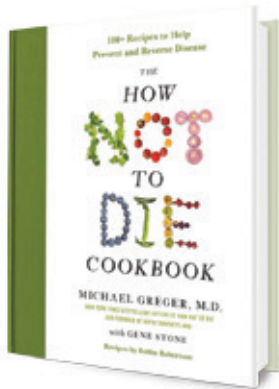
I don't do them all at the same time, luckily, but doing the audio book for *How Not to Die* was brutal. It took me five days!

### **After your lecture today, people were lined up out the door and waited nearly two hours to get signed copies of your books. How many copies of *How Not to Die* have been sold so far?**

About a half a million, but what's really interesting is that it is actually selling better now than it did a month after it was released. It is currently selling at a rate of a couple thousand a week!

### **What prompted you to issue your newest book, *The How Not to Die Cookbook*?**

It was the publisher who wanted me to come out with it, and I said okay as long as I don't have to do anything more than write the forward and approve the recipes, and that's what happened. The recipes were created by the famous cookbook author Robin Robertson and are really great.



### **Are the recipes salt-, oil- and sugar-free?**

Yes, they are. It even goes further and involves only whole plant foods so that even lemon juice is not an ingredient. Even though that might seem ridiculous, I did it just out of principle so I could say that every single ingredient, of every single recipe, should be a whole plant food—period. It was both a challenge and a blast!

### **In much of today's "vegan" cuisine—compared to "plant-based" cuisine—there is an abundance of added salt, oil and sugar. Do you agree that it's important to avoid salt, oil and sugar, what Dr. Alan Goldhamer refers to as "pleasure trap" chemicals?**

Of course! But there should not be a divide within the whole-food, plant-based health world since, by definition, these three additives aren't whole plant foods and, ideally, have no central place in our daily diets. As you correctly noted, the big divide is between the plant-based move-

ment and the vegan movement. While I applaud people that eat vegan because they want to save the planet and prevent harm to animals, at the same time, if they are living off French fries and beer, they really don't know or care about their health. So, that's why I don't like the term "vegan," since as a physician it just tells me what you *don't* eat; for all I know you're living off vegan donuts!

### **Since you are on the plant-based lecture circuit so much, are you tired of answering the perennial questions about where you get your protein and your calcium?**

Actually, I don't get those questions very often anymore. Perhaps it is because of the higher-level audiences. However, when the protein question comes up, particularly in professional groups, I like to say, "Anyone who doesn't know how to get protein on a plant-based diet doesn't know beans!"

### **But what about athletes? You often hear fitness trainers argue that you need more than just what you can get from beans. Is there anything to that?**

Not according to the National Institute of Medicine. There is some data on muscle hypertrophy but not on muscle strength, and the two don't necessarily correspond.

### **Are there adverse health consequences of that extra protein?**

Certainly. That's just a recipe for IGF-1 elevation.

### **What about vitamin B12 and Vitamin D?**

Taking a B12 supplement is very important, and if you're not getting enough sun, then you may be low in D and may want to supplement.

### **Can you take too much Vitamin D?**

Yes, if it's fat-soluble. The tolerable upper daily requirement is 4,000 International units, and so as long as you're below that, there's no risk of toxicity. In fact, you can probably go higher than that, but then you go against the guidelines.

### **Beyond B12 and Vitamin D, what do think of supplementing DHA/EPA?**

The literature is not great on the subject, but I think it's positive; not for our heart health, but for cognition. I recommend 250 milligrams of DHA and/or EPA, which is the recommendation of the WHO (World Health Organization).

### **Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, Jr. argues strongly that nuts should be largely avoided, particularly for those suffering heart issues, while others, like Dr. Joel Fuhrman, take the opposite**

*"Anyone who doesn't know how to get protein on a plant-based diet doesn't know beans!"*

**view and claim they not only shouldn't be avoided, but should be consumed as heart-healthy foods. What is your opinion on this issue?**

Dr. Greger has no opinion on anything. Dr. Greger just cares about the science.

**What does Dr. Greger say the science says about this?**

Thank you, that's the question. What we now know is that heart disease is reversible without medications, because that's the clinical data that we have. We put people on plant-based diets because it lowers cholesterol. Nuts also lower cholesterol; they are anti-inflammatory. So, one would expect a low-fat diet with nuts to be even better at reversing heart disease, but no one has ever done that study. My suspicion is it would work better. But, if you're dying from heart disease, you go with the data from randomized controlled trials that show a low-fat, plant-based diet works until we learn otherwise. In theory, this other diet might even work better, but we don't have the data yet. Until it's put to the test, you use what's been proven.

**Philosophically, does it seem to you that whole foods such as avocados and nuts (certainly not salted or oiled) should be consistent with good health and not inconsistent with good health?**

I'm waiting for the data. I mean, the data is beautiful, right? In fact, from what I have seen, nuts are probably the only food that's ever been associated with literally years of life extension. There was also a Japanese study suggesting longevity with dark leafy greens, but that's it in terms of individual foods that we know of.

**Let's talk about the consumption of oils. The lecturers that preceded you at this wellness event earlier today were extolling the benefits of olive oil and coconut oil. Is this all hogwash and are all oils the same?**

Some are much worse than others, but they're all bad. Coconut oil is much worse than canola oil because it's highly saturated. But canola isn't exactly a whole plant food either.

**Shifting gears, do you think the vast sums of money that are being invested in research to find a vaccine or other drug to cure or control cancer, diabetes, or MS could be better spent looking at the impact of diet and lifestyle?**

Not another day and not another dollar needs to be spent on any kind of research in these areas. We can eliminate like 80% of chronic disease just by changing our diet and lifestyle.

**Putting that aside, to what do you attribute the seeming explosion of autism that we're experiencing?**

That's an interesting question. I do know that there's no thimerosal connection, and anyone that says otherwise doesn't know the science. There may be other things contributing to it, like air pollution, but we don't actually know how real the autism spike is. I did a video that shows the increase is something like 800%, not the 8,000% some are claiming. That's still an enormous increase, and we really don't have a good idea why.

**During your lecture, and in your new cookbook, you repeatedly refer to your "Daily Dozen" to maintain great health. What is the Daily Dozen?**

The Daily Dozen is my checklist of all the things that should be part of a daily routine, including exercise, greens, healthy fruits, and the best vegetables. The goal is to inspire people to fit some of the healthiest lifestyle practices and foods into their daily lives. This can be downloaded free on iPhones and Androids; it is called "Dr. Greger's Daily Dozen."

**How do you get your Daily Dozen when you are on the road so much?**

I don't always. I visited 200 cities on my last book tour and, unfortunately, it can be a challenge to maintain a healthy diet, given that I'm sitting on my butt all day in an airport or in an airplane. It also makes it harder to get enough sleep.

**Dr. Greger's Daily Dozen** (NutritionFacts.org)

Everything we should ideally strive to fit into our daily routine for optimal health and longevity.

- BEANS** (3 servings): 130g cooked beans, 60g hummus
- FRUITS** (3 servings): 1 medium fruit, 40g dried fruit
- GREENS** (2 servings): 60g raw, 90g cooked
- FLAXSEED** (1 serving): 1 tablespoon ground
- GRAINS** (3 servings): 100g hot cereal, 1 slice of bread
- EXERCISE** (1 serving): 90 min moderate or 40 min vigorous
- BERRIES** (1 serving): 60g fresh or frozen, 40g dried
- CRUCIFEROUS** (1 serving): 30-80g chopped, 1 tbs horseradish
- VEGETABLES** (2 servings): 50g nonleafy vegetables
- NUTS** (1 serving): 30g nuts, 2 tbs nut butter
- SPICES** (1 serving): 1/2 teaspoon turmeric
- BEVERAGES** (1 serving): 1750ml per day (water, green tea, hibiscus tea)

Download Dr. Greger's Daily Dozen app and start tracking your daily servings right now. (Available on Google Play and App Store)

Don't forget about these two essential vitamins:
 

- VITAMIN B12**: 2500 mcg cyanocobalamin once a week
- VITAMIN D**: For those getting inadequate sun 2000 IUs of D3 a day

 Connect with us! (Social media icons)

## That doesn't sound like a very health-promoting lifestyle.

Not always, but this particular trip to Akron has been fantastic since I got to enjoy healthy meals with you, Wanda, and Sandie Sajner!

## How many years have you been doing this?

I have been speaking since 2001, so it's been 17 years.

## Over those years, I know the public interest in your whole-food, plant-based health message, and the size of your audiences, has swelled. To what do you attribute this?

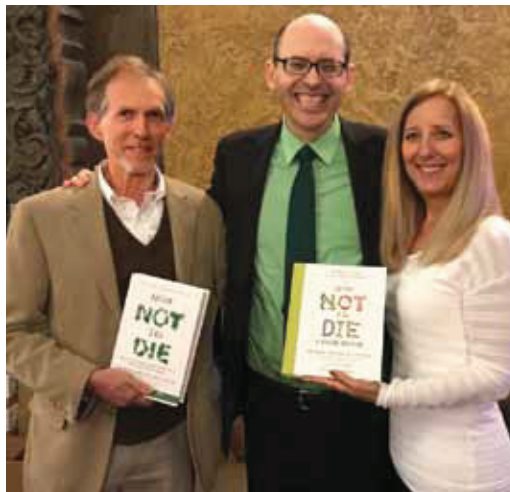
Interest in this message comes in waves. The first big wave was with John Robbins' book *Diet for a New America*, the next with the publication of *The China Study*, and also with documentaries like *Forks Over Knives*. All have inspired thousands of young people to rethink how we look at health and wellness. *Forks Over Knives* was followed by several other great documentaries such as *Eating you Alive* and *What the Health*, and soon it's going to be James Cameron's documentary, *Game Changers*. These really important resources have brought our message to very wide audiences.

## As I travel through so many airports, I notice that the food courts are offering more nutritious options. Are you optimistic that things are getting better?

Yes, I am. I find such optimism when a flight attendant or customs officer recognizes me and wants to have a picture with me. It used to only happen when I was eating in a vegan restaurant, but now it can be when I am just walking on the sidewalk in the middle of some strange city.

## Maybe that's just because of your good looks!

Oh no, no. I think the biggest reason for the positive reaction people have for me, and the message I and others in our movement are spreading, is that there is no longer a monopoly on health information. In the 1950s, the tobacco industry told the doctors what they should say and think, and they controlled the message. Now, as a result of the Internet and social media, people have unparalleled access. I consider it the democratization of information. Today you don't have to go to your doctor to find out your



Mark Huberman, Dr. Greger and Wanda Huberman

*“You can go online and educate yourself. The truth kind of floats to the surface and now people have access to information like we've never had before.”*

health options. You can go online and educate yourself. The truth kind of floats to the surface and now people have access to information like we've never had before.

## There were probably over a thousand people at the Akron Civic Center listening to you speak today, and I'm guessing these are the kind of crowds you're seeing around the country?

We are probably breaking the fire codes wherever we go!

## When you talked earlier about when you were in medical school, you said your nutrition education topped out at about 19 hours, and that it was not real nutrition anyway. Has that situation improved at all?

I don't know, but I doubt it. I also wonder whether we would even want doctors being taught nutrition in medical school if it was just going to come from the dairy industry or beef industry.

## There is, however, some very good news in terms of the growth of organizations like PCRM and The Plantrition Project, at whose annual conferences you recently spoke.

My gosh, yes! There were over 1,000 Plantrition practitioners in attendance; this has become my favorite conference.

## To what do you attribute these kinds of numbers?

When I talk to doctors, the first thing I ask is how they got into this, since it certainly isn't taught in medical school. And, amazingly, many of them say they learned from one of their patients! The common story I hear is that the patient followed the traditional treatment path for their chronic disease and, of course, got worse because, instead of treating the cause, the doctors were just treating the symptoms with medications and surgeries. When some of their patients rejected that conventional approach and adopted a plant-based diet and lifestyle, they got better. When patients like this return for their follow-up visits, they look fantastic and are off their medications; this can have a profound impact on their doctor, many of whom decide at this point to change how they practice.

## It's got to be pretty rewarding to see the dramatic increase in the number of views your website receives and the size

## of the audiences to which you now speak.

It's a beautiful thing to know that I, and my growing number of colleagues, are touching so many people.

## What is your familiarity with water fasting?

I've read just about every paper ever written on it, but that's not saying much because there isn't much there. However, Dr. Alan Goldhamer's hypertension work is probably one of the most exciting things I've read, and I love his two new case reports on lymphoma.

## You stress the importance of an aspirational approach to this diet and lifestyle, both in terms of things you want to avoid and things you want to add. Can you expand on that?

"Health and well-being" is just a spectrum, and it's important for people to realize that there is not a single perfect person. We can all eat better, because food is a zero-sum game. Every time we put something in our mouth, it's a lost opportunity to put something else in our mouth that's healthier. We can all kind of ratchet it up with our decisions.

## And then the other side?

Yes, there are things you want to increasingly aspire to avoid—even when it comes to those exceptions you allow yourself to make on holidays, birthdays, and special occasions. The reason we sometimes tell people not to make such compromises is not because we're afraid every person who uses some oil on their salad is going to be hurting themselves or that every person who smokes one cigarette will develop cancer. We know that not every person will fall into that trap, but there may be some psychological efficacy to having really strict rules and leaving little leeway in terms of things like added salt, oil and sugar.

## Dr. Herbert Shelton used to always caution that if you tell people they can have a little of this or that, the "little" exception can easily become the rule.

He was right.

## You've got to be thrilled at the bully pulpit that you now have.

I actually feel like I'm just getting started, and I have no intention of stopping until everyone has the information they need to be eating and living healthfully. Of course, what they do with that information is totally up to them. However, I am convinced that there are so many people out there who would change their diets if only they knew the information.

## So, when you're not creating videos for YouTube and for your website, what do you do for fun?

I work. And when I take a break from work, I do other

work to just split it up! I don't take vacations.

## So, you're not a baseball fan?

God forbid! Every minute taken away, every minute watching TV or whatever people do, is a minute taken away from saving lives.

## Dr. Greger, it's been a privilege.



### Dr. Greger's Health & Nutrition Topics

#### NutritionFacts.org

##### Most Popular Topics:

Women's Health	Men's Health	Cancer	Turmeric
GMO	Paleolithic Diets	Organic Foods	Plant-based Diets
Heart Health	Aging	Flax Seeds	Weight Loss
Soy	Diabetes	Acne	Eggs
Cholesterol	Dairy	Alcohol	Coffee
Protein	Omega-3 Fatty Acids	Alzheimer's Disease	Arthritis
Inflammation	Antioxidants	Depression	Blood Pressure
Fish	Beans	Acid/base Balance	Smoothies
Pregnancy	Nuts	Sweeteners	Sugar
Vitamin D Supplements	Salt	Introductory Videos	Microbiome

##### Additional Topics *See All on Website*

addiction	ADHD	allspice	almond milk
aluminum	anxiety	apple cider vinegar	asthma
Atkins diet	autism	autoimmune diseases	avocados
b12	back pain	beets	bipolar disorder
birth control pills	bladder infections	bone cancer	bone loss
breastfeeding	broccoli sprouts	calcium	canker sores
cannabis	cardiovascular disease	cavities	celiac disease
chocolate	colonoscopy	computer eye strain	Crohn's disease
diverticulosis	dizziness	DNA damage	dried fruit
eczema	erectile dysfunction	estrogen	eye health
fertility	fibroids	gallstones	garlic
Grave's disease	irritable bowel syndrome	kale	kidney stones
Lou Gehrig's disease	mammograms	mango	marijuana
marjoram	Mediterranean diet	melanoma	memory
menopause	migraine headaches	multiple myeloma	multiple sclerosis
multivitamins	mushrooms	music	neuropathy
nutritional yeast	obesity	onions	oral cancer
osteoporosis	pain	pap smear	paprika
Parkinson's disease	parsley	peanuts	pineapple
pizza	polyps	prebiotics	probiotics
processed foods	prostate cancer	radiation	raisins
rectal cancer	rheumatoid arthritis	rice milk	rosemary
schizophrenia	seafood	seaweed	seizures
serotonin	sexual dysfunction	SIDS	sinusitis
sore throat	soup	soy	spearmint
sprouting	St. John's wort	staph infection	stem cells
steroids	stomach ulcers	stroke	sugar
supplements	thyroid disease	tick bites	tofu
tremors	triglycerides	Vaseline	veggie burgers
venison	watermelon	wine	wrinkles
X-rays	yogurt	zinc	zucchini