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If you're reading this, I'm guessing you need inspiration in the healthy food department. Believe me when I say I've been there!

Before I changed my habits, walking the grocery store aisles felt like navigating a minefield. I knew I should make better choices, but unhealthy temptations surrounded me. And most of the time, they won.

The main reason I didn't opt for healthier foods was because I simply didn't know how to choose them, let alone how to *use* them. As I've learned and discovered new ways of approaching food, navigating the grocery store has become second nature.

In the following pages, you'll see the top twenty foods I keep in my kitchen. And if they're not there, I'm panicking and making plans to get to the grocery store ASAP.

You'll also find a bonus section with my top five healthy packaged snacks. Because let's face it, we all need a little chocolate once in a while. 😊

Many of these items you've probably stocked in your kitchen at one point or another. Some of them, maybe not. Either way, I hope this list inspires you with new ideas and ways of viewing your pantry and grocery cart.

Happy Shopping and Healthy Eating!

Sarah

Sarah's Top 20 Grocery Cart Must-Haves

1 – Earth Balance Natural Peanut Butter with Flaxseed (crunchy and creamy)

How I use it: I've tested several less processed versions of peanut butter, and Earth Balance is my favorite for flavor and texture. For a quick energy boost, I eat a spoonful on the go. Other ideas include making whole grain sprouted toast with peanut butter and banana slices, or topping celery sticks with peanut butter and adding raisins or chopped nuts.



2 – Low-Fat Plain Yogurt

How I use it: I love to eat yogurt any time of the day, but especially for breakfast or a mid-morning snack. I also enjoy it as a treat when the rest of my family is indulging in ice cream and I don't want the extra sugar or calories. Strawberries and pineapple are my favorite toppings because their fruit juices add natural sweetness. But if you don't have them handy, any fruit will do the job!

3 – Trader Joe's Organic Popping Corn

How I use it: This is my favorite nighttime snack! I pop the kernels in my handy [Nordic Ware microwave popper](#). It's super easy to use and makes a great batch of popcorn that can be tweaked to your individual tastes.



4 – Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

How I use it: When I sauté vegetables or meat, this is my go-to oil. I also like tossing it with potatoes to make oven fries or drizzling it over salad with balsamic vinegar.

5 – Eggs

How I use them: Eggs are a multifaceted breakfast option! They can be scrambled with sautéed vegetables, hard-boiled for a quick on-the-go meal, or used in a veggie-packed breakfast casserole. (I make a full batch and freeze individual servings for easy meals later.)



6 – Ezekiel 4:9 Whole Grain Sprouted Bread

How I use it: This bread is found in my grocer’s freezer section. It can be toasted for breakfast and topped with an egg cooked over-hard or with whatever nut butter you like. My personal favorite way to eat it is for lunch. I toast a slice of bread and top it with hummus, grilled chicken, and veggies (cucumber, tomato, baby spinach, or whatever else my heart desires).

7 – Unsalted or Lightly Salted Nuts (any variety)

How I use them: Nuts make a quick and easy snack option. I often keep a bag of nuts and raisins in my purse on days when I’m taxiing my kids to activities and need a healthy pick-me-up along the way.



8 – Organic Thompson Raisins from Trader Joe’s

How I use them: In my opinion, Trader Joe’s stocks the best raisins around, but any variety of raisin will do! They not only make a great snack combined with nuts, but they’re a quick and easy addition to my kids’ lunches. Raisins also make a tasty topper for oatmeal that’s been sweetened with a touch of pure maple syrup.

9 – Quick-Cook Brown Rice

How I use it: Since regular brown rice takes an hour to cook, I don’t make it very often. But quick-cook rice has only fifteen minutes of prep time, which makes it a handy side option. It tastes great cooked in vegetable broth and herbs. I also use it for stir-fry or layered in [Mexican bowls](#). It freezes well too!



10 – Dried Herbs

How I use them: Herbs are an awesome flavor enhancer, which allows me to reduce salt in my recipes. (The herbs I can’t live without are basil, oregano, and parsley, but I also love sage and chives.) When using dried herbs, I recommend adding them early in your cooking time. The longer they simmer, the more their flavor is released.

11 – Ground Cinnamon

How I use it: Cinnamon is another great flavor enhancer, allowing for reduced or no sugar in my foods. I add it to almost anything involving fruit, but I especially love to mix it with yogurt and diced apple. For an easy snack when you're craving dessert, it can be sprinkled over banana slices and baked at 350° for 10 minutes.



12 – Ground Flaxseed

How I use it: Flaxseed can be sprinkled on all kinds of things, like toast or oatmeal. Or you can add a dash of it to baked goods like [whole-wheat chocolate chip cookies](#) or to these healthy [cinnamon apple pancakes](#). The main way I typically use flaxseed is by adding one tablespoon to my smoothie mix. It has a slightly nutty flavor that blends well with the other ingredients.

13 – Fresh Bananas

How I use them: Bananas are so versatile! I love to eat them plain or topped with nut butter. I also freeze them to use in smoothies or healthy "ice cream". (In a food processor, blend 4-5 bananas' worth of frozen banana chunks until they resemble ice cream texture. For extra creaminess, you can add a splash of milk.)



14 – Fresh Gala Apples

How I use them: Galas are my favorite because of their crunch and sweet flavor! Apples are a delicious snack by themselves, or they can be sliced and topped with crunchy peanut butter. If you're looking for a healthier alternative to apple pie, you can slice and bake them with cinnamon at 400° for 20 minutes.

15 – Baby Carrots

How I use them: Carrots are a perfect on-the-go snack option. I pack a bag of them for my son's baseball games or on days when I'm running errands and know I won't be home for a while.

16 – Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes

How I use them: Any kind of spud makes a super easy side dish. They can be baked, mashed, or sliced and made into oven fries. I also like to roast sweet potatoes to make [healthy rice bowls](#) that can be frozen and enjoyed for lunches later.

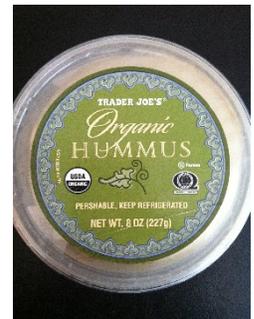


17 – Baby Spinach

How I use it: Baby spinach is wonderful in salads, especially tossed with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. My favorite way to use it, though, is in smoothies. If you're not sure about the spinach flavor, you can offset one cup of spinach with one banana and you won't even know the spinach is in there!

18 – Trader Joe's Organic Hummus

How I use it: It took me a while to get used to the flavor of hummus, but the organic version at Trader Joe's isn't loaded with obscene amounts of garlic and spices, which makes it a hit in my house! I like to use it as a veggie dip, but my favorite way to eat it is on sandwiches as a substitute for mayonnaise.



19 – Green Tea

How I use it: On most days, this is my primary water source. I brew two cups at a time and keep it in a thermal mug to take with me wherever I go. It's a great option for when I get bored with plain water! My favorite varieties are peach and apricot green tea, Trader Joe's candy cane green tea (available at Christmastime), and Teavana's jade citrus mint, which is available in loose-leaf form at Starbucks.

20 – Tazo Iced Passion Tea

How I use it: This is another favorite water source for me, especially in summer. Each pitcher-sized bag makes 64 ounces, so there's plenty of tea to sip throughout the day. With clean ingredients and no calories, this is a great water alternative!



Bonus: Sarah's Top 5 Healthy Packaged Snacks

Sometimes I want a snack that feels a little indulgent, but doesn't break the calorie bank. The following items are my favorites to keep on hand for "emergency munchies." Each of these satisfies the craving while also providing plenty of fiber and/or protein to fill me up.

SWEET CRAVINGS

Fage 0% Split Cup Greek Yogurt

A low-calorie treat that's loaded with protein.
The fruit topping makes it taste like cheesecake!



Larabar Minis

Around 100 calories, these bars give the perfect-sized sweet taste with natural ingredients. My favorite flavors are Peanut Butter Cookie and Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip.



Rx Bars

These are similar to Larabars, but they contain egg whites, which gives them an extra protein boost. They're on the pricy side, so I save them mainly for travel when I need a meal replacement option on the go.



SALTY CRAVINGS

Food Should Taste Good Multigrain Tortilla Chips

The perfect crunchy snack with a slightly nutty flavor.
I prefer them plain, but they're delicious with salsa too.



Trader Joe's "Inner Peas"

These crunchy, baked pea snacks are surprisingly tasty.
They have just enough salt to satisfy a craving and are
loaded with fiber.



That's it! The top 20 must-haves you'll find in my grocery cart + my top 5 packaged snacks.

You may have noticed a good number of these foods are from Trader Joe's. (I won't deny I have an addiction.) 😊

If you don't have a Trader Joe's near you, that doesn't mean you can't eat healthy! Look for similar options in your local grocery store. All it takes is stepping out of your comfort zone and trying something new.

Have fun with the process, and keep up the good work!