

10 nutrition myths: balanced eating tips

We'd all like to eat a little better. Maybe pack a few more fruits and vegetables into our diet while cutting back on the stuff that's not so good for us.

But what do you cut out of your diet and what do you keep in? There's a lot of information out there, and it's not always easy to figure out what's fact and what's fiction.

Here's a list of 10 popular food misconceptions.

Brown eggs are more nutritious than white eggs

Which egg is better for you? (Eric Risberg/Associated Press)The colour of an eggshell depends on the breed of hen that laid it. White eggs come from white chickens - like the White Leghorn - and brown eggs come from chickens that are predominately brown. Breeds include Rhode Island Red, New Hampshire and Plymouth Rock.

The vast majority of eggs produced in Canada are white. You can also - sometimes - find eggs with light blue, pink or green shells. They're produced by Araucana hens.

No matter what colour the shell, one large egg packs about 70 calories, 5 grams of fat - including 1.5 grams of saturated fat - and 190 milligrams of cholesterol.

Eating eggs raises your cholesterol levels

Not necessarily. Yes, eggs are high in cholesterol, but the link between naturally occurring cholesterol and your cholesterol levels isn't clear-cut.

The liver produces 80 per cent of the cholesterol that's in your body. The rest comes from the food you eat, mainly from foods high in saturated fat and trans fat. Dietary cholesterol does not affect everyone in the same way.

High cholesterol can lead to a buildup of plaque in the artery walls and increase your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation says the best way to control blood cholesterol levels is to eat a healthy diet that is lower in fat - especially saturated and trans fat. The foundation says most healthy people can average an egg a day without putting their health at risk.

The Egg Farmers of Ontario suggests there's no maximum number of eggs a healthy person can eat, as long as it's part of a healthy, well-balanced diet and lifestyle.

Want to lose weight? Pass on the carbs

You don't have to cut out the pasta if you want to lose weight. (Larry Crowe/Associated Press)Want to lose weight? Watch what you're putting into your mouth. A recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine found that it didn't really matter what type of diet someone is on. As long as you watch what you eat and increase your physical activity, you will likely lose weight.

The researchers put the study participants on four popular diets with varying amounts of protein, fat and carbohydrates. They were told to cut 750 calories a day from their diets and get 90 minutes of moderately-intense exercise a week. Everyone lost an average of 19 pounds after 6 months. But they also started to put weight back on after a year.

However, those who combined counseling with their diets kept most of the weight off after two years.

Carbohydrates are fuel for your muscles. Your body needs them - especially if you exercise.

For most healthy people, a balanced diet combined with moderate physical activity should be enough to keep weight at a healthy level.

Skipping meals helps you lose weight

Your body is a finely tuned machine. It is also designed for efficiency. It expects fuel at regular intervals. Start messing with that and your body will adapt to protect itself.

If you skip meals and cut too many calories during the day, your body will try to conserve calories instead of burning them. Your body will look for protein to keep your vital organs working. With not enough food coming in, it will begin to break down muscle.

The more muscle mass you have, the higher your metabolism. A lean, well-toned body is an efficient burner of calories.

If your body is starved of calories and your metabolism slows down, you will stop losing weight and may even put some on. You are also more likely to make up for the calorie deficiency and overeat when you do have a proper meal.

So, listen to your mother and eat your breakfast.

Only eat when you're hungry

Similar to above. Registered dietitian Andrea Holwegner says you should aim to eat smaller meals and snacks every three to five hours to maintain top energy levels - and also to prevent you from overeating at your next meal.

Your body, she says, works best when it's receiving a steady supply of fuel. Eating regularly helps your body regulate blood-sugar levels and keeps your body burning calories instead of hoarding them. If you wait too long between meals, your blood-sugar levels could fall, causing you to crave a quick fix.

Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, an obesity specialist in Ottawa, advises that people should eat every two to three hours, ensuring minimums of calories per meal and snack and ensuring protein with all meals and snacks because protein is more satisfying.

"If you've ever gone to the supermarket hungry, you'll know that hunger makes decisions for us. Waiting until you're hungry to eat has to be one of the worst pieces of advice, as by then you're shopping from your fridge, plate, freezer or menu, and just like in the supermarket, you will make different choices."

Freedhoff would like to see schools build snack breaks into the school day - and ensure that kids actually have healthy treats to snack on.

Sugar causes diabetes

Consuming too much sugar won't cause diabetes. However, if you let all those extra calories accumulate, you will increase your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin - or when the body doesn't effectively use the insulin it produces. Insulin is a hormone that regulates your blood-sugar levels, making sure your body's energy needs are met. The disease normally affects people over the age of 40.

Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in children and adolescents. It occurs when the pancreas cannot produce insulin. It's treated by daily insulin injections.

You can reduce your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes through diet and exercise. Obesity is a major risk factor. Rapidly rising obesity rates have been blamed for a surge in the number of cases of Type 2 diabetes.

Consuming extra protein is necessary to build muscle mass

Your body needs protein to maintain muscle mass. If you don't take in enough protein, your body will take it from your muscles. However, in the developed world, it's pretty tough not to get enough protein into your diet. Meat, eggs, nuts, grains, legumes and dairy products such as milk and cheese are all sources of protein.

Consuming extra protein won't build up your muscles any faster - unless you're doing significant weight training at the same time. Still, you should

have no trouble taking in all the protein you need with a balanced diet - even if you're into bodybuilding.

Everyone should take a multivitamin

Your body is normally very good at extracting what it needs from the food you eat. Eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, along with moderate amounts of low-fat dairy and protein will usually give your body all the vitamins and minerals it needs.

However, if your diet is not up to scratch, you might want to take a multivitamin. Or you might want to rethink your diet.

There are instances when multivitamins are recommended, such as during pregnancy or for people with nutritional disorders.

Eating after 8 p.m. causes weight gain

It doesn't matter what time of day you eat. If you take in more calories than you burn, your body will store the excess calories as fat. If you want to snack at night before you go to bed, you won't put on weight - as long as you've taken in only as many calories as your activity level requires.

A study that examined the eating patterns of two groups of rhesus monkeys, found no difference in weight gain among the group that ate most of its calories at night and the group that ate most of its calories earlier in the day.

However, if you choose to consume those night-time calories sitting on the couch watching television, you could be at risk of taking in much more than your body needs to use.

Nuts are fattening - avoid them if you want to lose weight

Yes, nuts and seeds can be quite high in fat and calories. But that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Nuts and seeds are high in unsaturated fats - the good kind. They're also a very good source of protein. Eating more nuts and less meat could actually leave you consuming fewer calories - and much less saturated fat.

Some nuts - especially walnuts and brazil nuts - are also high in omega-3 fatty acids, which may help in the fight against heart disease.

Still, 75 to 95 per cent of the calories in nuts come from fat, so you need to be careful that you don't eat too many.

Canadian researchers launch trial to test faster tuberculosis therapy

Canadian researchers are about to embark on a quest for an answer that could make treating latent tuberculosis a lot easier and, it's hoped, more frequently successful.

Advocates demand inquiry into Ontario's costly handling of Royal Crest nursing-home failure

Advocates representing nursing-home staff and residents are calling for a public inquiry into how the Ontario government dealt with a chain of long-term care homes that showed questionable business and care practices.

Saskatchewan's HIV infection rate a 'crisis': top health doctor

Health officials in Saskatchewan are pressing the alarm button over what they are calling a "crisis" in new HIV infections.

Quebec judge promises quick ruling in listeriosis settlement

A Quebec Superior Court judge says he will decide quickly if a \$25-million settlement deal can go ahead between Maple Leaf Foods and victims of last year's deadly outbreak of listeriosis.

Bypass surgery safer than angioplasty for some: study

Heart bypass surgery may be less deadly than angioplasty for some seniors and those with diabetes, a review suggests.

Headlines

March rally continues as TSX surges on merger news

The stock market rally was back on this morning as investors reacted positively to the news of a possible merger between Suncor Energy and Petro-Canada.

Suncor, Petro-Canada announce merger

Canadian energy giants Suncor Energy Inc. and Petro-Canada have reached a deal to merge into a single company.

Canada's leading economic indicator falls in February

Canada's leading indicator continued its southward march in February as nine of the 10 economic components that make up the measure lost ground in the month.

No indication of problems from pilot before Montana plane crash

The pilot of a plane that crashed into a cemetery in Butte, Mont., did not give air traffic controllers any indication the aircraft was experiencing any difficulties, U.S. National Transportation Safety Board officials said Monday.

Bomb blast kills senior Fatah official, 4 guards in Lebanon

Five people, including a senior official in the Palestinian Fatah faction, were killed Monday in a roadside bomb explosion in southern Lebanon, security sources said.

About the Author

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