Top 20 Food Myths of 2020

The Top 20 Nutrition Myths of 2020

Published on 02 JAN 2020 by Examine.Com
(Condensed Version with some extra thoughts from Dr. V)

The original article was over 30 pages in length and includes 134 unique references to scientific papers. I figured you would enjoy a condensed version, that you can read in just a few minutes and then ask me questions as they arrive. I love Examine.Com because they dig into the research and don't get paid by companies to support products in any way.

So let's just jump into this. You may not agree with what you are about to read. I know it all doesn't sit perfectly with me, but I love that it has nothing to do with marketing and everything to do with research and physiology of the human body. The Internet is rife with misinformation so all of us need to be careful.

Myth 1: Protein is bad for you

-Bone Loss: protein actually has a neutral or even protective effect on bones.
-Kidney Damage: this has not been concluded, but perhaps if you have a pre-existing condition.

Myth 2: Carbs are bad for you

-As long as you don't overindulge (especially on sugar & processed foods – which truly are the enemy) there is nothing inherently wrong about carbs. I prefer a low-carb diet (20% or less), but that does not mean it's best for each of us.

Myth 3: Fats are bad for you

-If you stay in caloric surplus (more calories eaten then burned off), a low-fat diet won't make you lose weight. You need some omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, and saturated fat won't necessarily give you a heart attack (but too much trans fat may). For me, it's the HIGH-FAT, HIGH-CARB diet that is the killer. From what I am seeing in my own clinical practice, HIGH-FAT, LOW-CARB is helping to reverse diabetes, decrease high blood pressure and increase quality of life overall.

Myth 4: Egg yolks are bad for you

-The media is great at scaring us away from perfectly healthy foods. It is true that foods high in cholesterol can increase LDL cholesterol in most people, but to a fairly small extent on average. What is more important is that some of the micronutrients and other bioactive compounds in egg yolks could interfere with cholesterol absorption, which may help explain why many studies have failed to find an increase in cholesterol in egg eaters.
-What you must know is this: **while a review of what are known as "observational" studies associated higher consumption of egg cholesterol or eggs with higher risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and all-cause mortality (death) in a dose-response manner, clinical trials (a more rigorous type of study) found no association between eggs and CVD, except in some people who "hyper-respond" to dietary cholesterol.**
-The Bottom-Line: Eggs are a great source of protein, fats, and other nutrients.

Myth 5: Read meat is bad for you

-The marketing myth: RED MEAT CAUSES CANCER. Absolute statements are why we have so many nutrition myths. After all, most everything we eat has the potential to be involved in cancer development.
-What is true: some compounds such as polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), found in smoked meats – have been found to damage the genome, and this damage is the first step in potential cancer. Current evidence points to processed meats, particularly those that are more charred during cooking, as posing greater risk.
-It all comes back to a balanced diet and lifestyle that definitely includes exercise.
-My advice, if you enjoy eating red meat, limit your intake to three servings per week (serving = 3 ounces or 85 grams), and think twice about consuming high processed, cured or smoked types.

Myth 6: Salt is bad for you

-Some myths do in fact contain a "grain" of truth. Studies have associated EXCESS salt intake with high blood pressure, kidney damage, and an increased risk of cognitive decline. But salt is an essential mineral; its consumption is in fact critical to your health. The problem occurs when you consume too much salt (sodium) and too little potassium. And the source of salt makes a huge difference. The average North American (and you don't want to be average) eats an incredible amount of salty processed foods – which means that people who consume a lot of salt tend to consume a lot of foods that are generally unhealthy.

-For most of us, managing our processed food intake is likely much more important that micromanaging our salt intake.

Myth 7: Bread is bad for you

-While some of us are sensitive to wheat, the gluten content isn't necessarily to blame, and other foods may also be implicated. Bread, nor any other food, will inherently cause weight gain unless its consumption puts you in a caloric surplus. Though whole-wheat bread is claimed to be far healthier than white bread, they aren't that different, and neither contains high levels of fiber or micronutrients.

Myth 8: HFCS is far worse than sugar

-High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) and table sugar are very similar from a health perspective. Though HFCS may sometimes contain more fructose, the difference is negligible. Sugar in this case is in fact sugar!

Myth 9: Dietary supplements are necessary

-Supplements have their use, but I don't think anyone should be taking them without a viable reason. I have several patients taking over 20 or more of them and many folks don't know why other than to tell me that "my friend told me to" or "I saw it on Facebook or TV." Some people may benefit from supplementing specific vitamins or minerals.

-Supplements should complete a healthy diet – not replace it.

Myth 10: Food nutrients > supplemental nutrients

-Not always. Especially in regard to vitamins, and more so because of the processing of foods. But this does not necessarily mean you need to take a bunch of supplemental nutrients either. Many doctors, naturopaths and nutritionists think they know best. Plus, the often-missed issue is that supplements are not regulated. Just because the label says one thing does not mean that is what you are actually getting in the bottle.

-One example is the curcumin in turmeric (and I wish this weren't true as I love curry and Indian food). On its own, your body cannot absorb it well; but taken in liposomal form or supplemented with piperine, a black pepper extract, curcumin sees its bioavailability increase dramatically.

Myth 11: Fresh is more nutritious

-There is little difference between fresh and frozen, nutrient-wise. Canned produce tends to undergo a lot more processing, but remember that cooking is a form of processing too. Overall, fresh and frozen produce might be more nutritious than canned produce, but eating enough whole-food fruits and veggies is more important than how they were processed.

Myth 12: Foods labeled "natural" are healthier

-Overall, the "natural" label isn't tightly regulated. Importantly, neither the USDA nor FDA defines "natural" in relation to the healthfulness of the food. In other words, a "natural" label doesn't guarantee the product is healthful (though it might be).

Myth 13: You should eat "clean"

-"Clean eating" is tough to define, as gurus don't even agree on which foods are clean and which are not. Stick to the basics. Favor whole foods (but don't feel like any small amount of processed foods will kill you), eat organic if you wish to and can afford it, and peel or wash all your vegetables and fruits.

-Sometimes RAW foods are great, but at other times they are not.
-Pesticide-free and Organic are not always the most truthful of statements.

Myth 14: You should "detox" regularly

-Focus on sustainable health habits, such as eating nutritious foods. Ample protein, leafy greens, and foods chock-full of vitamins and minerals are not just tastier than anything a "detox diet" has to offer, but they're also way better for you (and your liver detoxification pathways, ironically). A detox diet might make you feel better, but that's usually because of increased whole-food intake, not because of any form of detoxification is taking place. And there are reports of such "detoxes" causing both kidney and liver damage.
-I prefer intermittent fasting and whole day or even longer fasts as a great way to truly detox. Then once you are done you start introducing nutritious foods again. I am not a fan of juice cleanses and would rather just do plain water fasts with some electrolytes. But again, this is just my opinion.

Myth 15: Eating often will boost your metabolism

-Digestion does slightly increase your metabolic rate, but your meals' frequency will have less effect on your weight than their total caloric content at the end of the day. I used to be a proponent of the 5 to 6 meals per day plan (especially for athletes and those trying to lose weight) as I really thought it was necessary, but that was years ago.

Myth 16: You shouldn't skip breakfast

-You don't need to eat breakfast to be healthy or lose weight. You should base your breakfast consumption on your preferences and personal goals. Feel free to experiment to see if you want to make skipping breakfast a habit. I have been intermittent for the past few years myself, and breakfast for me sort of just faded into the wind. Although I typically still enjoy a breakfast on a weekend morning with my kids, and I still keep it healthy.

Myth 17: To lose fat, don't eat before bed

-Eating late won't make you gain weight, unless you eat more. Resisting tasty, high-calorie snacks can also be harder after a long day.

Myth 18: To lose fat, do cardio on an empty stomach

-There's very little difference between cardio in the fed or fasted state (although I myself workout better on an empty stomach) with regard to fat loss, muscle preservation, daily caloric intake, or metabolic rate. What really matters, then, is you. Some people feel lighter and energized when they do cardio on an empty stomach, while others feel light-headed and sluggish. Fed or fasted: pick whichever makes you feel better.

Myth 19: You need protein right after your workout

-This is known as the "anabolic window" which simply means the "growth period." Unless you've been exercising on an empty stomach, you don't need protein immediately after your workout, but you might benefit from 0.24 – 0.60 grams per kilogram of body weight (0.11 to 0.27 g/lb) within the next couple of hours. What matters most, however, is how much protein you get over the course of the day.

Myth 20: Creatine will increase testosterone but cause hair loss & kidney damage

-None of these things are true. Creatine helps you exercise harder by making it easier for your cells to regenerate ATP, a source of energy. Out of all the supplements available, it is one of the most extensively studied. The majority of evidence indicates it is safe for long-term use and is unlikely to harm your kidneys, cause hair loss, or increase testosterone.
-If you want to focus on optimizing testosterone levels you should focus on better-proven options: sleep, exercise, calories, Vitamin D, magnesium, and Zinc as suboptimal levels of each of these can decrease testosterone production.