



MYTH BUSTING AROUND WOMEN'S HEALTH

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With information so readily available on various platforms, within seconds our friend Google can help us out. Imagine life without electricity, cell phones, television and of course social media. It has become such a massive part of our everyday lives that living without these seems unrealistic. As amazing as technology can be, often there are a few shortfalls in the information we receive. The contradictions leave us with confusion. To clear the confusion, we separate the science from the silliness and focus on facts rather than fiction. Let's take a closer look.

MYTH BUSTING

A myth is a widely held belief or idea that is false. Often myths have been passed down from generations and people still to this day believe they are true. Behind nutrition and health myths we often find a kernel of truth. Here are a few common myths:

1. Eggs increase cholesterol levels

Not so long ago there was great concern over the cholesterol content of eggs. An egg contains about 212mg of cholesterol which is over half the recommended daily intake of 300mg¹. Cholesterol is the fatty substance in blood that contributes to clogged arteries and cardiovascular conditions. New studies have shown that most healthy people can eat 1 egg a day without any problems¹⁻³.

It is important to note that dietary cholesterol - in eggs or other foods - does not increase blood cholesterol that can result in cardiovascular conditions. How it works is that the body compensates by manufacturing less cholesterol itself. We should stop worrying so much about cholesterol in food and rather focus on our total diet with special focus on total fat, saturated fat and trans fats – these are the chief heart-disease culprits, and these raise our blood cholesterol^{2,4}.

2. Heart disease mostly affects men

Many people believe that heart disease affects mostly men just like they believe that breast cancer is a "women's disease." Truth is cardiovascular disease (CVD) affects both men and women. CVD (including heart disease and strokes) is the leading cause of death and disabilities worldwide, accounting for 17 million deaths a year (31% of total global deaths)⁵. Every hour in South Africa: 5 people have heart attacks, 10 people have strokes and of those events, 10 people die. As scary as this is up to 80% of CVD-related premature deaths in young people (individuals < 65 years) are preventable through a healthy lifestyle – a healthy diet, regular exercise and not smoking⁵.



3. High-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is worse than sugar

When we eat something that contains sugar, whether it is brown sugar, syrup, honey, fruit or white sugar our body recognises it as sugar. Brown sugar is healthier than white sugar - another common myth. Yes, brown sugar contains minerals such as calcium, potassium, iron and magnesium, which white sugar doesn't have, but the amounts are negligible. According to the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, the idea that high-fructose corn syrup is any more harmful to your health than sugar is one of those urban myths that sounds just about right but isn't².

High-fructose corn syrup was created to mimic table sugar (sucrose) so its composition is almost equal to sucrose's (55 percent fructose, 45 percent glucose; with sucrose the ratio is 50:50). The calories are also identical. Studies that compare the effect of HFCS and other sweeteners have shown that HFCS and sucrose have very similar effects on blood levels of insulin, blood sugar levels, satiety hormones and triglycerides. Basically, it seems to be no worse—but also no better—than sucrose, or table sugar².

Instead of focusing on HFCS we should be focusing on the effect of total sugar in our diets. Epidemiologic studies show that consuming large amounts of added sweeteners—primarily in sodas and other sweetened drinks—is associated with higher risk of fatty liver disease, insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes and heart disease². The American Heart Association recently recommended that women consume no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugar and men no more than 9 teaspoons of added sugar per day¹.

4. Carbohydrates cause weight gain

With countless diet therapies out there, many people believe that carbohydrates cause weight gain. Think no-carb or low-carb diets but there is nothing inherently fattening about carbohydrates. Eating more calories than what your body uses causes weight gain and that's a fact.

Instead of cutting out carbohydrates which is our body's main energy source and provides us with vital nutrients including fibre, we should rather focus on the type of carbohydrates. Eating too much sugary and refined carbohydrate foods such as white bread, pasta and cakes will surely result in weight gain. Focus on the so called "good carbohydrates" such as wholegrains, beans, fruits and vegetables, choose options that are low GI (these give us slow sustained energy and keep us fuller for longer) and options that are high in fibre⁴.

5. Sea salt is a healthier version of regular salt

Sea salt comes from evaporated seawater whereas everyday table salt comes from a mine, both varieties contain roughly 2300 milligrams of sodium per teaspoon⁶. Sea salt (like brown sugar) contains some minerals such as magnesium and iron but in trace amounts to have a health benefit. Table salt is regularly fortified with iodine, which



plays an important role in regulating hormones. Some companies do also fortify sea salt, be sure to check the label. Bottom line – no one option is healthier than the other.

6. Diet soda helps keep you thin

Research around diet soda and body composition has shown that artificial sweeteners used in diet soda —lead to hard-to-control food urges later in the day⁶. Other studies have showed that artificial sweeteners before meal time resulted in higher calorie intake from food than those who consumed sweetened or regular soda⁶.

In a report published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, researchers looked at 37 studies which fit their inclusion criteria and included more than 400,000 people over a 10-year period. Shockingly individuals who consumed sweeteners regularly by consuming one or more artificially-sweetened beverages – had higher risks for weight gain obesity, diabetes and heart disease⁷

7. Detoxing is important to cleanse my body

Truth is our bodies are so amazingly designed they have their own systems in place that helps to remove toxins – namely, the kidneys, liver and spleen⁴. There is no research or evidence which shows that eating certain foods or consuming only juice for a certain period will help your body to the job any better².

CONCLUSION

We need to go back to the basics. Instead of believing everything we see on the internet or social media, remember if it seems too good to be true – it probably isn't true. Don't believe all the myths out there, look for sources that are scientifically backed.

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