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Bust a Myth, Get a Benefit

Dr. Ornish sets us straight on common diet myths.

By Dean Ornish, MD



From [Reader's Digest](#)

Few subjects harbor more myths and misconceptions than nutrition. Some of the most common:

"Low-fat" means "healthy."

Low-fat foods can be healthy, but not always. The problem? Many processed foods that are low in fat are high in sugar, which gives you extra calories and may cause wide swings in your blood sugar levels. This makes you gain weight and lose energy, and may raise your risk of several diseases. Some people believe "low-fat" means "Eat all you want."

I remember a dieting patient who was puzzled because he was gaining weight. He mentioned he was eating a low-fat cake. When I asked him how much, he replied, "Oh, one or two." "One or two pieces?" "No, one or two cakes!"

An ideal diet is low in fat and low in sugar. Most people can enjoy high-sugar, high-fat treats on occasion, but if you indulge one day, be sure to eat healthier the next.

Canned fruits and vegetables aren't nutritious.

They can be. A recent review of studies found that nutrients are generally similar in comparable fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables. Many parents have told me that, knowing this, they might be more likely to cook at home rather than eat less nutritious meals at restaurants.

Red wine, not white, prevents heart disease.

Yes, drinking red wine may significantly decrease the risk of heart disease, but white wine may be just as protective, at least in rats.

Resveratrol is a healthy substance found in the skin of red grapes. It's higher in concentration in red wine than white because red wine is fermented with the skins, allowing it to absorb the resveratrol. American and Italian researchers recently found that grape pulp extract (white wine) was equally effective in protecting rats from a heart attack as grape skin extract (red wine). Also, most of the antioxidant benefits of wine come from the grape itself, not the fact that it's fermented.

Studies show that spending time with friends and family may reduce the risk of many illnesses. People who imbibe moderately often do so in the company of others, and these psychosocial factors may be as powerful as the drink itself.

I neither prescribe nor proscribe alcohol, but if you're going to drink, have no more than one or two four-ounce glasses of wine, one or two beers, or one or two ounces of liquor. More than that, and the toxicities of alcohol begin to outweigh any of its potential benefits.

Juice is less healthy than whole fruits.

Not always. "The view that pure fruit and vegetable juices are nutritionally inferior to fruits and vegetables, in relation to chronic-disease risk reduction, is unjustified," concluded a recent review of studies. The impact of antioxidants on disease risk may be more important than the amount of fiber. Whole fruits and vegetables do have more fiber than most juices, and fiber has many benefits. It fills you up before you get too many calories, and it helps regulate blood sugar. Some juice companies are preserving the pulp (which adds to the fiber) or are even putting it back in.

Summer Diet Traps

It's the season for travel, day trips and meals on the run, and it's easier than ever to eat healthy on the road. At airports, look for fresh fruit and packaged salads. Dip your fork in the dressing instead of pouring it on. Amusement parks are providing healthier choices. Disney will eliminate added trans fats from its parks by the end of this year, and kids' meals will include sides like applesauce and carrots -- not fries. Some fast-food places offer better choices, too, so you can eat well just about anywhere.

Comments :

By newyorkdude, 06/10/2008, 1:42 PM EDT

The greatest diet myth is that we have the final answer. If you live long enough you will learn that just about everything you think is true today will be found to be untrue tomorrow. Food science changes as often as underwear changes. newyorkdude newyorkdudeinindia.blogspot.com

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