

Nutrition Myth-Busters

Think you know the real skinny on everything from the ‘evils’ of eggs to the benefits of sports drinks? Read on...



BY MARIA BLACKBURN

Some guy at the gym says you need to eat more protein because you work out regularly. Your wife reports that she’s banned all carbohydrates because they lead to unwanted weight gain. Your mother tells you not to microwave vegetables because it zaps all of their vitamins.

Everybody, it seems, has something to say about nutrition. But how do you separate fact from fiction? Easy. We asked three registered

dietitians, all spokeswomen for the American Dietetic Association, to weigh in on six popular nutrition myths. Their answers may surprise you.

Myth: Eggs are bad for you.

Truth: Just because eggs are high in cholesterol, and high cholesterol can lead to heart problems doesn’t mean you need to avoid eggs, says Keri M. Gans, a registered dietitian in New York City and author of “The Small Change Diet” (Gallery Press, 2011). “Research has shown that it’s not cholesterol that increases a person’s cholesterol levels, it’s saturated fat,” Gans says. “There’s nothing wrong with eggs as part of a well-balanced diet. What you don’t want to do is have those eggs fried with bacon and home fries because that increases your saturated fat for the meal.” One egg has 70 calories, is high in protein, and contains vitamin D, folate and other nutrients. Plus, eggs are inexpensive. Gans suggests her patients eat up to one whole egg a day mixed with as many egg whites as they like, and she recommends eating an egg at breakfast because the added protein in the meal can help them feel full until lunch.

Myth: Carbohydrates make you fat.

Truth: Carbs don’t make you fat, but excess calories do, says Heather Mangieri, a registered dietitian and a board-certified specialist in sports

dietetics. “Carbs are easier to overeat than fat and protein,” says Mangieri, whose practice, Nutrition CheckUp, is in Pittsburgh. “And simple carbs like candy, soda and granola bars tend to be digested quickly so they can leave you feeling unsatisfied.” But carbohydrates are an important source of fuel for the body and shouldn’t be avoided. Instead she suggests that diners choose whole grain carbs, and be aware of portion sizes and of how carbs fit into a balanced diet.

Myth: Fasting is necessary to cleanse toxins from your body.

Truth: “What toxins?” says Andrea Giancoli, a registered dietitian in Los Angeles. “You don’t need to fast to cleanse toxins because your body already has a sophisticated system that gets rid of toxins before they can build up.” Eating a balanced diet with whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lean protein helps keep this system running well. “Fasting for more than a day is unnecessary and can be potentially detrimental to your health.

The body is resilient, but you need to treat it well. A seven-day fast is not treating it well.”

Myth: Microwaving removes nutrients in vegetables.

Truth: Microwaving actually helps preserve nutrients in vegetables, Giancoli says. “Vegetables tend to be high in vitamin C and vitamin B, both water-soluble vitamins that break down really easily. When you boil a vegetable like broccoli, many nutrients go into the water. When you steam vegetables, you lose fewer nutrients. And when you steam vegetables in the microwave, you are cooking them so quickly that you actually retain more nutrients.”

Myth: If you’re working out, your body needs sports drinks and extra protein.

Truth: “Most Americans consume enough protein in their regular diet and don’t have to seek out additional sources if they are exercising regularly,” Mangieri says. What about sports

drinks like Gatorade, which are designed to replenish the body with glucose and electrolytes lost during exercise? “Under most circumstances, if you are exercising for less than 45 minutes, water is perfectly fine,” she says.

Myth: Eating at night makes you fat.

Truth: “You could eat dinner at 10 p.m. every night and still be at your ideal body weight,” says Gans. “It’s all a matter of how many calories you consume at that evening meal.” The problem isn’t what time you eat, she says, but how much you eat. People who eat late may be more likely to overeat because they have gone too long without eating and can’t catch up with their hunger. As a result, they continue grazing after dinner. “If your schedule is crazy and you can’t eat dinner until late at night, don’t fret,” she says. “Just make sure you are eating a well-balanced dinner with lean protein, a salad, maybe a small baked potato and a huge helping of steamed veggies, and you’ll be fine.”

