UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION
College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

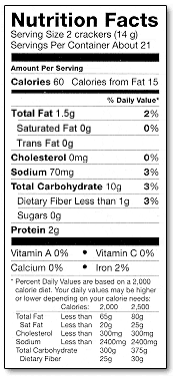
Diet Detective: Uncovering Nutrition Myths

With all of the different nutrition advice today, it sometimes gets confusing what to believe. While some advice sounds promising, others have no reliable research to back it up. Here are 10 nutritional myths and the truth about them.

Myth 1: Eating at night makes you fat

Calories don't know the difference from day to night. No matter the time of day that you eat, the calories you eat will add up for the day. Foods that are eaten later in the day will be stored in the body and then used the next day. When snacking at night though, people tend to choose unhealthy snacks. Night snackers also tend to over eat if they have not eaten enough throughout the day.

Tip: try choosing something light like fruit or a bowl of cereal



Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 2 crackers (14 g)
Servings Per Container About 21

Amount Per Serving
Calories 60 Calories from Fat 15

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 1.5g	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 70mg	3%
Total Carbohydrate 10g	3%
Dietary Fiber Less than 1g	3%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 2g	

Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0% • Iron 2%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2400mg	2400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Myth 2: All fat is unhealthy for you

Saturated fat is solid at room temperature. It increases LDL (low-density lipoprotein cholesterol) levels which are not good for you. Saturated fats come from foods like butter and red meats. Trans fat is chemically modified through hydrogenation, which increases shelf life of foods. It also increases LDL (low-density lipoprotein cholesterol) levels and decreases HDL (high-density lipoprotein levels) levels which are not good for you. Examples of foods with trans fats are margarines and processed cookies or candy bars. Unsaturated fat is liquid at room temperature. It is generally from fish and vegetarian sources, so it is better for you. Unsaturated fat increases HDL (high-density lipoprotein levels) levels which is good for you. LDL is known as 'bad' cholesterol while HDL is known as the 'good' cholesterol.

Myth 3: To eat less sodium, avoid salty tasting foods & use sea salt

If a food doesn't taste salty, don't assume it doesn't have sodium. Many processed foods contain a lot of sodium to keep them fresh. Many people are not aware that baking soda and baking powder contain a high amount of sodium, so foods such as pancakes are high in sodium. You should always check the label to see how much sodium is in a certain food. A good resource for nutrient data is http://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ .

Sea salt vs. Table salt

Sea salt and table salt have the same amount of sodium chloride by weight. The main difference is where they originate. Sea salt is evaporated salt water. Sea salt can have certain minerals depending on the water source that it originates from. Table salt is mined from underground salt deposits. This type of salt is heavily processed to eliminate minerals and

contains additives to prevent clumping. Iodine is also included, which is an important element in our diets.

Myth 4: Sugar causes behavioral problems in kids

Consider the situation that the child is in while consuming the sugar. A child will already be excited if they are at birthday parties or if it's a holiday, and also if the candy is a reward for them. Many children become excited from the situation, not the consumption of sugar. Sugar can cause tooth decay and lead to obesity if eaten in excess, so it should still be consumed in moderation.

Myth 5: Protein is the most important nutrient for athletes

Protein is necessary to help rebuild, maintain, and replace body tissues including muscles. But unless you are a body builder, which requires more protein, much of the food we normally consume has all the protein we need. Powder protein mixes and bars aren't necessary. Carbohydrates is our bodies preferred energy source. Complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains, raw fruits and vegetables, and legumes take a longer time to digest and absorb. Therefore, energy lasts for a longer period of time. After a workout, a small carton of low-fat chocolate milk, whole grain bagel, or banana will replenish energy stores quickly and get the athlete back into performance shape.

Myth 6: Wheat bread is healthy bread

Look for the word "whole" on the ingredient list of food labels. Just because an item says "wheat" does not mean that it is a source of whole grains. Not all wheat bread has whole grains in it. Whole grains are a good source of fiber, vitamin e, selenium, zinc & potassium.

Myth 7: Carbs will make you fat

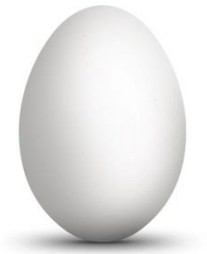
It's important to have carbohydrates by eating whole grains, beans, fruit & vegetables. Carbohydrates are the body's main source for fuel, vital nutrients, and fiber. While low carbohydrate diets may lead to initial weight loss, studies prove it is difficult to maintain. The problem is we tend to eat a LOT of carbohydrate foods, such as breads and sweets, which all contribute excess calories. Try decreasing the amount of breads and sweets and aim to only eat whole grains.

Myth 8: Type 2 diabetes can be prevented by not eating sugar

Type 2 diabetes is caused by the body's resistance to insulin, not a diet high in sugar. Insulin is produced by the body and needed to keep your blood glucose under control. When glucose continuously builds up in the blood it can result in diabetes. Risk factors for type 2 diabetes are high blood pressure, family history, ethnicity, physical activity, and obesity. A diet high in sugary types of food and drinks can lead to obesity, which can lead to diabetes, but it is not a cause for diabetes.

Myth 9: High-fructose corn syrup is worse for you than sugar

High-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and sucrose have almost identical compositions. They are both made up of fructose and glucose. HFCS is made of 55% fructose and 45% glucose while sucrose is 50% fructose and 50% glucose. What matters the most, though, is how much sugar including HFCS you consume. Consuming too much sugar may lead to obesity and other complications, such as diabetes.



Myth 10: Eggs are bad for your heart

The maximum cholesterol a person should consume in one day is 300 milligrams. Each egg has approximately 211 milligrams. One egg per day can be a part of a healthy diet as long as cholesterol intake is still less than 300 milligrams for the day. Saturated and trans fats should also be limited because they can raise blood cholesterol, and lead to heart disease.

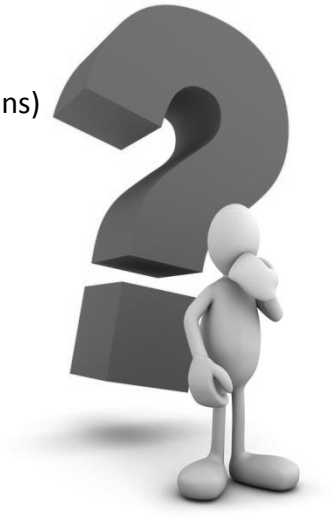
Misleading words

Although words like 'natural' and 'organic' might sound like they are healthier, they have nothing to do with a food's nutrition. Organic is a word used to describe how the product is grown and produced. Natural describes how a food item is minimally synthesized. A cookie that is high in calories and fat may be labeled as organic or natural, but is not considered to be a healthy food. Likewise, words such as 'pasteurized' and 'irradiation' may sound like foods that should be avoided, but they are processes used to protect our foods and keep them safe. It generally does not affect nutrition content

Keep in mind:

When looking at a nutritional statement, keep these factors in mind:

Promises that sound too good to be true or have dramatic statements are most likely untrue
Ask an expert such as a registered dietitian or licensed dietitian if you are unsure
Government agencies, health organizations, educational institutions have the most credibility
There are no magic treatments
Who wrote it?
Why was it published?
How are nutritional claims supported?
What or who was studied? (Animal results are not always the same for humans)
How large was the group who were studied?
Is any information left out?
Lists of "good" and "bad" foods- All foods can fit into a healthy eating plan!



Online domain credibility

Most credibility:
.edu: Educational institution
.gov: Government agency

Some credibility:
.org: Organizations, often nonprofit

Least credibility:
.com: Commercial sites
.net: Networks
.info: General use
.biz: Business

Tips for determining reliable Web sites

- Look for a contact address, phone number, or email
- Check the links for supporting data
- Check when the website was last updated for current information
- Look for accreditation or certification symbols
- Be sure your privacy is protected

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