



Nutrition Myths 101

Many misperceptions exist within the field of nutrition. Become a critical consumer, read food labels and nutritional claims carefully, and learn about some common nutrition myths.

Myth #1: Vitamin supplements provide everything you need to maintain good health.

Fact #1: Vitamins alone can't keep you healthy. They can't neutralize the negative effects of a diet high in saturated fat, salt, and sugar. Nor do they supply the disease-fighting phytochemicals and fiber found in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The best way to maintain good health is to eat a well balanced diet, enjoy regular physical activity, get enough sleep, and practice stress reduction techniques. It is not a bad idea to take a daily multivitamin and mineral pill to supplement your healthy diet. But keep in mind that more is not better. High doses of vitamins and minerals can cause toxic effects, including liver, kidney, and nerve damage, skin disorders, and even death. "Natural" or "organic" vitamins are also promoted as being better than "synthetic" ones. In most cases, it makes no difference how a vitamin is

manufactured. Your body cannot tell the difference, and "organic" vitamins are generally more expensive.

Myth #2: "95% fat-free" means only 5% of the calories come from fat.

Fact #2: When you see a product advertised as 5% fat, this means that 5% of the total weight of the product is from fat. The calories from fat can actually range from 30%-60%. For example, a popular luncheon meat is advertised as 95% fat free. If you read the label carefully, you will discover that each slice of meat contains 50 calories and 3 grams of fat. Each gram of fat contains 9 calories, so 27 of the 50 calories are from fat, or 54% of the calories are from fat.

(Continued)



www.snac.ucla.edu



Myth #3: Items bought in health food stores are better for me.

Fact #3: Just because a product is sold in a health food store, does not mean it is good for you. Health food products are generally more expensive and offer no greater nutritional value than their supermarket counterparts. Also, terms such as “all natural” have no legal meaning. These products can contain preservatives, additives, cholesterol, and high amounts of saturated fat. For example, a granola bar advertised as “all natural” may contain a greater amount of saturated fat than a candy bar.

Myth #4: Honey is better than white sugar because it is natural.

Fact #4: Many people claim that honey is better than sugar, when in fact they are almost chemically indistinguishable. However, spoon for spoon, sugar actually contains fewer calories than honey. Although honey does contain small quantities of minerals, they are present in such tiny amounts that they have little nutritional significance.

Myth #5: “Cholesterol-free” means a product is heart healthy.

Fact #5: With all the concern about cholesterol and heart disease, numerous companies are promoting their products as cholesterol-free. Blood cholesterol is a contributor to heart disease, but saturated and trans fat increase blood cholesterol levels more than dietary cholesterol. Therefore, read labels carefully to see if “cholesterol-free” products contain any saturated or trans fat. Foods such as crackers, cookies, chips, sports bars, and other snack foods often contain palm, coconut, or hydrogenated vegetable oils (which are even more saturated than butter). Look for labels that list the grams of fat and type of fat used. Don't be persuaded by misleading advertising.

For more information on nutrition myths please visit www.snac.ucla.edu.