

MYTHS & TRUTHS

KNOW YOUR NUTRITION

We're bombarded with nutritional advice, but how do you separate fact from fiction? Nutritional Therapist Monique Parker explains how to manoeuvre through the minefield of nutrition myths and truths.

For many people, the confusion on what is a healthy diet and what isn't is very real.

Should we be eating a Paleo diet or go vegan? Does the ketogenic diet really have an impact on cancer? Many

experts, health gurus and food bloggers advocate a way of eating that in their opinion is the best or promote certain foods that are beneficial for health issues. Some claims are supported by science, some are unfounded. But who can we believe?

Let's talk about fat, baby

To give you an example, let's talk about fat. For decades, fat has been considered the bad guy, with some of its crimes including causing cardiovascular disease and making us put on weight.

A study conducted between 2003 and 2013 in 18 countries looked at the dietary intake of 135,335 people between 35 and 70 years old. The research showed that total fat and types of fat were not connected with cardiovascular disease, heart

attacks, or cardiovascular disease mortality. High carbohydrate/low fat diets were linked to a higher risk of mortality.

Going back as far as 2010, there is another study on the link between saturated fat and heart disease. The conclusion of that study was that there is no significant evidence for concluding that dietary saturated fat is associated with an increased risk of heart disease. And there are many more studies that show the same results.

Another fat-related subject, that has been in the media quite a bit, is coconut oil. I'm sure you have read many articles and blogs on the wonders of this type of fat, saying it's the best thing you could eat to it being the worst.

Am I still eating coconut oil? Yes. Because, as with many foods, there are pros and cons. One tablespoon of coconut oil contains 13.5 grams of fat in total, of which 11.2 grams are saturated fat. But coconut oil is also high in medium chain fatty acids that are easier to digest, like lauric acid, which has antimicrobial properties too. Coconut oil also has a higher burning point, is easier to store and gives a nice flavour to food.

A lot of research has been done and it has shown that coconut oil is both good and bad. When you check PubMed, a free search engine accessing

a database of references and abstracts on life sciences and biomedical topics, you will find around 1750 research articles on coconut oil. That is not very helpful, I know. Many different opinions that raise the question "who is right and who is wrong?".

How to get better informed on nutrition claims:

1 Look further than the headline of the blog or article. Very often, evidence supports a claim, to support the point of view. There won't be mention of evidence that contradicts the statement.

2 How valuable is the evidence?

3 If there is any research behind the claim, find out

Common nutrition claims

Skipping breakfast is OK 'OR' Eating breakfast can help in losing weight

The Paleo Diet is unhealthy and fattening 'OR' The Paleo Diet has many health benefits

Intermittent fasting is beneficial for your health 'OR' Intermittent fasting can lead to overeating, poor sleep, muscle loss and malnutrition

Low carb diets are good for weight loss 'OR' It is calories not carbs that really matter in terms of fat loss

Drinking coffee can lower your risk of early death 'OR' Coffee consumption can have health risks

Avoiding Gluten may be bad for you 'OR' Going gluten-free may improve your energy level


Eggs are high in cholesterol and bad for your heart 'OR' Eggs are a superfood

if it was conducted on animals or humans. What works for animals might not work for a human.

4 Check who has funded the research. Some research is paid for by the food industry and there could be conflict of interest, as companies would obviously like to promote their products.

5 How many people were involved in the study? Larger studies are usually more reliable than smaller ones.

6 Keep your eye on the big picture and look at your overall diet, instead of focusing on individual nutrients. Nutrients interact with each other. For example, fibre feeds your good bacteria in the colon and these bacteria produce vitamin B12.

7 Never forget that we are all highly individual. We all have our own genetics, and nutritional needs can't be based on an average. So, a diet that works for you might be unsuitable for your friend. 

"Look further than the headline of the blog or article"

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