

From the Nutritionist

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“Scary” Nutrition Myths

Since October is the Halloween month, all sorts of scary things are around us! It’s a great time to shed light on some “scary” nutrition myths — things people believe about nutrition that just aren’t true. While some of these are newer myths, others have been around for decades. In any case, studies have now proven them to be false. How many of them have you believed?

- 1. Celery has “negative” calories.** The idea that your body burns more calories by digesting a food than it absorbs from the food is a myth. If you’re eating food, you are consuming calories. It doesn’t take a lot of calories to digest food, so even low calorie foods aren’t negative calorie foods.
- 2. Wraps are healthier than regular sandwiches.** Tortillas are thin, but the ones used to make wraps are usually quite large — and contain as many calories as 3 or 4 slices of bread. They often contain more fat than bread too, because of the oil needed to make them flexible. If you’re watching your calories, you’d be better off with a 2-slice-of-bread sandwich than a wrap.
- 3. Dark chocolate is good for you.** Polyphenols, which are nutrients found in dark colored plant foods including chocolate, have health benefits, but most chocolate — even so-called “dark” chocolate — is so processed that most of the polyphenols are lost. Only chocolate containing at least 70% cacao might have health benefits — if it isn’t also loaded with sugar!
- 4. Egg yolks are bad for you.** Egg yolks do contain dietary cholesterol, but newer research shows that eating cholesterol doesn’t increase the cholesterol in your blood. Plus, egg yolks are loaded with essential fatty acids, fat-soluble vitamins and other nutrients not found in the white.
- 5. You can eat as much as you want as long as it’s healthy.** All foods contain calories, including nutritious foods. Some, like avocados and nuts, have quite a lot of calories per serving. That doesn’t mean you should stay away from them — but it does mean that you should pay attention to portion sizes of all foods, especially if you’re watching your calorie intake.
- 6. Skipping meals is a good way to lose weight.** Although you might “save” some calories by skipping a meal, it may make you feel hungrier and lead you to eat more at the next meal than you normally would, and increase cravings for unhealthy foods. Together this can cause you to consume more calories than if you would have just eaten that meal in the first place.
- 7. Eating late at night will make you fat.** There is no proof that eating after a certain time of day causes more weight to be gained. It’s really about the total amount of calories consumed compared to the amount of calories used by the body. However, many people snack on high calorie foods late at night — and that could be a cause of weight gain.
- 8. Eating extra protein builds muscle.** It’s true that to build muscle you need enough protein, but excess protein doesn’t turn into muscle — it’s used as energy or stored as fat. Building muscle requires a balanced diet with the right amount of calories and protein, along with a well-designed exercise program.
- 9. If you crave certain foods it’s because your body needs the nutrients they provide.** If people craved foods high in nutrients, we would all crave fruits and vegetables, not chips and cookies. Food cravings are real — but not for that reason.
- 10. Diet soda will help me be slim.** Studies are showing that artificial sweeteners like those found in diet soda might lead to hard-to-control food cravings later in the day, and could cause metabolic changes making it more difficult to be slim. Regular soda isn’t a better option — drink more naturally low-calorie drinks like plain or infused water and unsweetened iced tea.

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.