Nutrition Fact vs. Fiction

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“So now everything you like is bad for you. But check back in a month or so and I’m sure it will all be good for you again.”
Today’s Discussion

- Why we’re confused
- Nutrition fact and fiction from today’s headlines
- Savvy consumption of nutrition information
Why We’re Confused

- Volume and accessibility of information
- Scientists make mistakes too
- Blame the media
- Anyone can give nutrition advice
Why We’re Confused

- Nutrition beliefs can be based in ideology
- Sometimes greed comes before honesty
- “New” information gets more attention
- We want a magic bullet
“The method of science is the method of bold conjectures and ingenious and severe attempts to refute them.”

- Karl Popper, Philosopher of Science
Fact vs. Fiction
The Fiction: Chocolate is good for you, so eat any kind, in any amount.
Chocolate: What We Know

- Cocoa beans are rich in flavonols (more in dark chocolate, less in milk chocolate)

- Research supports:
  - Decreased risk of heart failure
  - Decreased risk of heart attack
  - Decreased risk of stroke
  - Lower blood pressure
  - Associated with lower LDL and higher HDL
  - Associated with lower BMI
Chocolate: What To Do

- To have any health benefit, it must be dark chocolate with at least 60-70% cocoa.
- An amount of up to one ounce per day may confer health benefits without creating a calorie imbalance.
- And let’s not overlook the “happy” factor that chocolate can provide.
The Fiction: Red wine is the only type of alcohol that has health benefits.
Alcohol: What We Know

- Any type of alcohol can confer a health benefit
- Moderate drinking has been linked to:
  - Increased HDL ("Good" cholesterol)
  - Reduced platelet stickiness
  - Improved insulin sensitivity
  - Increased risk for breast cancer (mitigated by folate)
  - Alcohol-related accidents
Alcohol: What To Do

- Impossible to make blanket recommendations
- If you don’t already drink, don’t start
- The drinking pattern matters
- For some groups, there is little benefit and substantial risk
- 60 year old men have the most to gain
- 60 year old women must weigh heart disease benefit with increased breast cancer risk
The Fiction: Coconut oil is a miracle food that treats a wide range of health problems.
Coconut Oil: What We Know

- Very limited evidence on disease outcomes
- May be “less bad” than other saturated fats due to its potent HDL-boosting properties
- Still not as good as unsaturated fats such as olive, canola, and soybean oils
- Better than margarines that contain trans fats
Coconut Oil: What To Do

- Limit saturated fat intake of any kind to no more than 10% of total calories
  - 12 g for 1,200 calories
  - 20 g for 2,000 calories
- Consume most of your fats as unsaturated fats like olive and canola oils, nuts, and seeds
The Fiction: Organic foods are always healthier than conventional foods.
Organic Foods: What We Know

- No conclusive evidence that organically grown food is more nutritious than conventionally grown food
- Consuming organic food will lower your exposure to synthetic pesticides
- Organic farming practices encourage soil and water preservation and reduce pollutants
Organic Foods: What To Do

- Choosing to eat organic is a personal choice
- Focus on eating fruits and vegetables, whether organic or conventional
- To make the best use of your money, use the Dirty Dozen list as your guide
- Buy local and in season
- Wash produce before consuming
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<th>2014</th>
<th>Dirty Dozen+</th>
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<td>(buy these organic)</td>
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<td>- apples</td>
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<td>- celery</td>
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<td>- cherry tomatoes</td>
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sustainablebabysteps.com  Images courtesy of EWG
The Fiction: A gluten-free diet can help you lose weight.
Gluten Free Diet: What We Know

- For 1% of population with celiac disease, a gluten-free diet is appropriate
- A gluten-free diet eliminates many healthful whole grains that are rich in B vitamins, iron, and fiber
- Gluten-free foods are usually more expensive and may contain more calories
- Weight loss may initially occur due to reduced intake of refined grains and processed foods
Gluten Free Diet: What To Do

- If you suspect you have gluten problems, get tested for celiac disease
- If you do have celiac disease, follow a gluten-free diet to manage symptoms and damage
- For the average person, weight loss can be achieved by consuming a diet that includes gluten-containing whole grains
The Fiction: Eating at night makes you gain weight.
Eating at Night: What We Know

- A calorie is a calorie, regardless of when you eat it.
- It’s more about how people tend to eat at night:
  - Emotional eating due to stress, boredom, fatigue
  - Eating in front of a TV or computer
  - Consuming high calorie snacks like chips and ice cream
  - Not controlling portions
Eating at Night: What To Do

- Structure the day so that you are fueling your body at regular intervals with a mix of carbohydrates, protein, and fat
- Ensure evening snacks are nutrient-dense and portion-controlled (and eat only when hungry)
- Keep tempting trigger foods out of the house
The Fiction: Eggs raise cholesterol levels.
Eggs: What We Know

- The cholesterol in food has a much smaller effect on blood lipids than fats in the diet.
- Eggs are an inexpensive source of high quality protein.
- Eggs are a nutritional powerhouse containing vitamins B12 and D, riboflavin, folate, choline, and carotenoids.
Eggs: What To Do

- For healthy individuals, up to one egg yolk per day can be acceptable.
- If you have heart disease or diabetes, limit to 3 eggs yolks per week.
- To control heart disease risk, focus on limiting your intake of saturated and trans fats.
The Fiction: You can be fit and fat.
Fat and Fit: What We Know

- Regardless of BMI, an unhealthy metabolic state is linked to increased risk of death
- Obese people who are metabolically healthy still have increased risk of premature death
- Overweight people who are metabolically healthy do not have increased risk - perhaps you can be “a little fat and fit”
Fat and Fit: What To Do

- Lowest risk = normal BMI and metabolically healthy
- If you are obese and metabolically healthy, you can decrease your risk by moving into the normal or overweight BMI category
- If you are normal BMI and metabolically unhealthy, you can decrease your risk by improving your metabolic risk factors
How to Sort It All Out
Questions to Ask Yourself

- Who is the author?
- What are the author’s credentials?
- Is a credible sponsoring institution identified?
- What is the purpose of the information?
- Is the site promoting or selling a particular product? (beware of “.com”)
Questions to Ask Yourself

- Is the information based on scientific research or opinion and testimonials? (look for “.gov,” “.edu,” or “.org”)
- How current is the information? Is a date listed?
- Does an editorial board oversee the content?
- Does it take a balanced approach or does it sound too good to be true?
- Can you “triangulate” the information with reputable sources?
“No single food will make or break good health. But the kinds of food you choose day in and day out have a major impact.”

- Walter Willett