8 Diet Myths, Busted

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Nutrition and diet can no doubt be tricky; especially when diet myths are circulating everywhere we turn. The true fundamentals of eating healthy are simple; balance, moderation and variety. Below are 8 commonly heard myths about dieting and the facts that bust them.

Myth #1: Carbohydrates are fattening.

Fact: Many carbohydrate sources are actually low in calories and fat and full of fiber. Choose brown rice, whole wheat breads and pastas, fruits and vegetables and dried beans and legumes. These are all great sources of nutrients and part of a healthy diet in moderation.

Myth #2: Carrots are pure sugar.

Fact: Low carbohydrate diets have given carrots a bad name. In actuality, carrots are low in calories, contain zero fat and are also a good source of fiber. They are also an excellent source of antioxidants and one of the best sources of vitamin A. Antioxidants protect against heart disease and cancer and vitamin A promotes good vision.

Myth #3: Fat free means calorie free.

Fact: When fat is removed from a food, it is typically replaced with more sugar and carbohydrates to maintain its palatability. Fat free foods can pack a significant amount of calories, especially if eaten in excess.

Myth #4: Juice is healthy, just like eating fruit, right?

Fact: Although 100% fruit juice contains vitamins and minerals such as vitamin C and iron, the process of turning it into juice means that the fiber content is lost. Fiber not only aids in digestion but also aids in the fullness factor. One can easily consume hundreds of calories in fruit juice and still be hungry, resulting in overconsumption and thus, weight gain. Solution, eat whole fruit instead and drink water.

Myth #5: When you eat doesn't matter — only how much.

Fact: Total calories are still the biggest driver of weight, but timing is not irrelevant. Research on circadian rhythms and meal timing has found that the same number of calories eaten late in the day is associated with greater weight gain than when those calories are eaten earlier — late eating raises hunger hormones, lowers energy expenditure, and shifts the body toward storing fat rather than burning it. For most families the practical takeaway is a consistent schedule of 3 meals and 1 to 2 snacks per day, with the bulk of food earlier in the day, rather than a large meal right before bed.

Myth #6: Eating sugar makes kids hyperactive.

Fact: Controlled studies do not support this common belief. Sugar does not contain anything that would cause hyperactivity, and a meta-analysis of controlled trials found no effect of sugar on children's behavior or cognition. The thought is that kids get excited by the activities that usually surround the eating of sweets such as celebrations and holidays.

Myth #7: Skipping meals is a healthy way to lose weight.

Fact: Skipping meals is not a reliable weight-loss strategy — though not for the reason people usually give. The idea that missing a meal throws the body into "starvation mode" and slows metabolism has not held up: a review of randomized trials found that adults who ate breakfast actually took in more calories overall and weighed slightly more than those who skipped it. The better reasons to eat regularly, especially for children, are appetite regulation, overall diet quality, and school performance. CDC survey data from 2023 found that 17.9% of high school students skipped breakfast every day, and students earning mostly A's and B's were about 35% less likely to be daily breakfast skippers. Balanced, predictable meals help kids avoid the strong hunger that leads to overeating later.

Myth #8: Salads are always low in calories and fat.

Fact: Salads, especially those served at restaurants, can sometimes pack more calories and fat than a cheeseburger and french fries! The basis of a salad, lettuce and other fresh vegetables, are low in calories and fat; however, the added ingredients such as nuts, cheese, fried tortilla strips and full fat salad dressing can push a "healthy" salad to 1000 calories or more! When eating out, feel free to modify the salad by asking for certain items to be left off and always ask for the salad dressing on the side so that you can control how much you use.

Information and mis-information concerning diet and nutrition is everywhere you turn. Approach the messages you hear and read with common sense. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. There is not a magic bullet to a healthy diet and body. Practice balance among food groups, moderation of serving sizes and amounts and eat a variety of foods to get the most out of your diet.

References

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