

Myth: Skipping a meal is a good way to diet and lose weight.

Truth: The research shows that if you skip meals you are more likely to be overweight. This appears to be especially true for those who skip breakfast.

With skipped meals there is a slowing of your body's metabolism. The theory is that this is to preserve the stored calories through slowing the need for them. There is also good evidence that if you skip a meal you are likely to eat more at the next one, or worse, to snack (usually on whatever is handy).

Eat three regular meals a day, and if you are working at losing weight, eat smaller portions.

Myth: Carbohydrates are bad for you.

Truth: This is just plain silly. Your body uses carbs as its primary fuel source. Carbohydrates have about half the amount of calories per gram as fats do. The problem with people's diets today is that they contain a lot of simple carbohydrates like sugar and high fructose corn syrup. Simple sugars like these pack in the calories. When people eat low-carb diets, they eliminate these very high calorie carbohydrates and they lose weight. This type of weight loss doesn't last for most people, however.

Research has shown that eating a diet low in fat and high in complex carbohydrates like whole grain and starches is good for you and is the best way to lose weight.

Myth: Low-fat and fat-free (non-fat) foods are low in calories.

Truth: Eating a low fat diet is good for you. That said, you must have fat in your diet. Beyond the fact that your body needs fats, they taste good.

It is important to remember that low-fat doesn't always mean **low-calorie** and non-fat does not mean no calories. Apples don't have any fat and are good for you, but they still have calories.

The issue is that a lot of low-fat or non-fat foods on the market are actually very high in calories. Many times they are also much higher in sodium than the "regular" version. Food manufacturers will add sugars and other carbohydrates as well as salt to compensate for the fat that is left out.

Always check the calories of foods that you are eating. Many times the low-fat version will have almost the same amount of calories (or more) than the full-fat version.

There are some places where low-fat is generally better. Dairy products are one. On the other hand, any snack food that is labeled low-fat (or low-anything) should be suspect. Check the Nutrition Facts on the label.

Truth: Fats have a lot of calories per gram (about twice that of carbohydrates and protein). Because most of the processed and fast foods today have very high amounts of fat, it's easy for people to gain weight eating them.

There are a number of different types of fats that we consume. When you read the Nutrition Facts on a food label, the total fat is reported and it is made up of saturated fat, monounsaturated fat and trans-fats.

The fats to avoid in your diet are saturated fats and trans-fats. Fatty meats and high fat dairy products are high in saturated fat. Trans-fats are found in many processed foods like stick margarine, baked goods and snack foods. Both of these types of fats have to be reported on food labels.

There are good fats, however, and choosing foods that have monounsaturated fats like those in seeds, nuts, grapeseed oil and olive oil have been shown to improve your cholesterol profile. Omega-3 fats are found in fish, some seeds, and nuts, and they appear to decrease the risk of cancer and strokes.

Even though there are good fats, they still contain calories, and watching the amount of total fat you eat is as important as the types of fats.

Myth: The kinds of foods that you eat are more important than the amount you eat.

Truth: People will go out of their way to eliminate carbohydrates or fats completely from their diet. Most of the time they end up eating the same number of calories in other types of foods.

Calories are calories whether they come from fat or carbs. If you eat too many calories for the amount that you are going to burn, you will gain weight. Simple. It is the **amount** of food that you eat that is important.

Myth: Dairy products make you gain weight or help you lose weight.

Truth: Dairy products are pretty good for you, but like any food they have calories. The main issue is that many dairy products have a fair amount of fat. Choose non-fat or 1% milk if you drink milk. Most of recipes that call for milk work fine with either 1% or 2% milk. There are many excellent low-fat cheeses on the market as well.

I use non-fat yogurt for recipes as well as eating and there is excellent evidence that yogurt is very good for you. There are often a lot of added calories in flavored yogurt, so check the label carefully.

Dairy products have lots of good quality protein as well as calcium. Most have been fortified with Vitamin D to help your body absorb the calcium. The low fat dairy products have essentially the same amounts of protein, vitamins, carbohydrates and calcium as the high-fat choices.

Myth: You have to work out for 45 minutes at a time to get anything out of exercise.

Truth: I am not an expert in exercise physiology, but the research is clear that most people don't get enough exercise these days. There are good studies that show that even walking 30 minutes three times a week has tremendous benefit.

Ideally your target should be at least 30 minutes 5 times a week. The good news is that breaking this up into two 15 minute segments works fine. That's not much—a couple of miles walking instead of a single sit-com on television. Walking is a lot more fun than watching the evening news and so much better for you. When you do exercise, try to work a little harder at it each time you do. Begin with a stroll for 30 minutes but within a month you can be up to a brisk walk.

Myth: Eating late at night or just before you go to bed makes you gain weight.

Truth: Calories are calories. Period. If you eat too many and don't exercise enough, you will gain weight. Eating late and going to bed simply doesn't matter.

When you eat too much your body has an amazing ability to store the extra calories as fat. Eating later for most people generally means that they have eaten more calories than they need.

Myth: Celery is negative calories.

Truth: It is true that celery has almost no calories. A medium stalk contains all of 6 calories. It's also pretty good for you in that a large stalk has about a gram of fiber and is high in calcium and trace minerals. Interestingly, celery is also fairly high in sodium for a vegetable—about 50 mg for a large stalk.

The theory that many people put forward is that your body uses more than 6 calories chewing and digesting the celery. There are actually books written about this but, unfortunately, there's no research to support the claim.

The body uses between 10 and 15% of the calories you consume for the total process of digestion. In someone consuming 1,500 calories per day that's 225 calories in 24 hours. It takes the same 225 calories for digestion whether you eat 1,500 calories per day in celery or in bread. The difference is that you would have to eat 250 stalks of celery per day to eat 1,500 calories as opposed to about 15 slices of bread.

Here's how celery can help people lose weight: it tastes good, it takes time to chew, it's filling and it's low in calories.

Myth: Cholesterol is bad for you.

Truth: Cholesterol is actually a type of fat and in its raw form is a waxy yellow gunk. It is different from most fats because the cholesterol molecule is more like a steroid molecule. Your body uses it to produce different hormones.

It is actually pretty easy to eat a diet that is lower in cholesterol, but we now know that the types of fats we consume are as important as the amount of cholesterol we eat. It is the way that saturated fats and trans-fats interact with cholesterol in the bloodstream that can cause health problems.

Your liver produces about 300 mg of cholesterol per day, which is about what is needed for the body to function properly. But we also consume cholesterol in the foods that we eat. Because plants don't produce cholesterol, any cholesterol that we eat must come from animal products. A lean cut of meat has the same amount of cholesterol as one with a lot of fat. The key is to eat the one that is leaner and thus lower in saturated fat.

Myth: A slow metabolism prevents weight loss.

Truth: Researchers call the amount of calories that one burns doing nothing "resting metabolism" or "Basal Metabolic Rate" (BMR). It is true that BMR can be important in helping to figure out how many calories a person needs every day, but there's never been solid research showing that people with "slow metabolism" gain weight any faster than others. In fact, as people gain weight their metabolism actually speeds up.

The key to weight loss is to eat fewer calories and burn more. Choose great tasting food that's lower in calories, be careful with portion size and spend more time exercising.

Myth: If you exercise you don't need to eat healthy.

Truth: Certainly exercise has a profound effect on your long term health. Regular exercise that helps you burn calories has been shown to help you live longer. Adding some type of weight (resistance) training can help you live better.

This doesn't, however, allow you to eat whatever you wish. I have had more than one endurance athlete come in for a check up only to find that their cholesterol profile was terrible. Simple changes in diet brings this back in line.

Keep in mind that elite athletes don't eat just anything. There is, in fact, a tremendous amount of research now about nutrition targeted at the proper diet for athletic training.

Myth: Vegetarian diets are healthier.

Truth: Eating strictly vegetarian has been shown to be good for you. There is excellent research to show that when people don't eat meat they eat fewer calories than people who do. The research is, however, often done under controlled circumstances where the vegetarian diet is also a lower fat diet.

The best plan is to look at recipes and the nutrition facts. How many calories are there? How much fat and saturated fat? Are there trans-fats? How much protein? Eating healthy is about choosing foods that are lower

in calories and fat. Watching salt is a good idea, as well as trying to eat foods that have been processed as little as possible. This is true for both vegetarians as well as omnivores.

Myth: Supplements make a good substitute for a healthy diet.

Truth: Eating supplements for meals is not a good substitute for eating healthy. The key to eating healthy is a little bit of planning. By knowing what you like to eat and having it on hand you can put together a quick meal. Taking a little extra time to make a healthy sandwich will usually have fewer calories than many of the “diet shakes” that say they can help you lose weight. You get more other good things out of eating this way than just the essential nutrients.

Stick to real food.

Myth: Foods labeled “natural” are better for you.

Truth: There is no legal meaning for the word “Natural.” The FDA does not regulate this word and just because something is labeled this way doesn’t mean anything. Often it can mean that a food is **not** good for you. Lard is natural, butter is natural, sugar is natural, high fructose corn syrup is technically natural as well as a host of flavorings that are extracted from natural products through highly complicated processing.

A good example of this is the recent advertising campaign by the company that makes the soda 7UP. They claim to have removed all “artificial ingredients” from their drink. This is debatable as some feel that high fructose corn syrup is not “natural.” Nonetheless, soda with all that high calorie sweetener is bad for you and labeling 7UP “natural” is misleading in my opinion.

Even some of the organic products that are on the market use flavorings considered “natural.” This often adds up to nothing more than a highly processed product.

If a package is labeled “natural” it should actually be cause for wariness on your part and not a feeling of reassurance that the product is good for you.

Myth: White sugar is bad for you.

Truth: Too much of anything is bad for you and this is where the issue is a problem for white sugar. The Western diet now contains pounds and pounds of sweeteners (this includes white sugar, high fructose corn syrup, glucose syrup, dextrose, honey, maple syrup and other edible syrups). As of 1999 Americans were consuming just over 147 pounds of these sweeteners per year!

Replacing honey for white sugar is really no better for you, for instance. In fact, a tablespoon of honey has 64 calories and a tablespoon of granulated sugar only 49 calories.

There is no difference as far as your body is concerned between more refined sugars and more natural products (table sugar vs. honey, for example). Calories are calories and the way to eat healthier is to eat fewer calories.