

# The False Nutrition Myths You Probably Still Believe

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We are constantly bombarded with health and nutrition information from various sources. Whether it's the trainer at the gym, your coworker or your neighbor, it can seem like everybody is dispensing unsubstantiated nutrition advice. But, what does that mean for you? And is that advice evidence-based?

While it may seem overwhelming to keep it all straight and learn the latest diet tips, we need to know what is scientifically true versus the latest fad. Here are some dietitians' favorite nutrition myths, busted.

## **MYTH #1 – LATE NIGHT EATING MAKES YOU GAIN WEIGHT**

This is a longstanding myth that many dieters try to avoid. The bottom line is, your body needs calories and it will burn them whenever it gets them.

Sometimes life and work circumstances result in late meals and snacks. Rather than avoiding nighttime eating completely (and feeling guilty if you have to eat late), focus on choosing nutrient-dense options. Eating a nutrient-rich meal may be better than skipping a meal altogether to help balance your blood sugar and provide nutrients before going to bed. Just avoid mindlessly consuming additional calories at night, which can lead to weight gain.

## **MYTH #2 -- GLUTEN FREE MEANS HEALTHIER**

Gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye, has become a dietary villain. While 1% of the population has Celiac disease (and a small percentage of others have a gluten sensitivity), the majority of people have no problem metabolizing gluten. Yet, a reported 30% of all Americans are either avoiding or completely eliminating foods containing gluten from their diets.

Gluten-free has become a nutritional buzz term, which people automatically equate with healthfulness. Yet, no research supports the notion that gluten-free products offer more health benefits than traditional products containing gluten. In fact, gluten-containing foods carry many nutritional benefits, from fiber and iron to B-vitamins and antioxidants. Replacing them with gluten-free alternatives often leads to additional fat, calories and sugar, in addition to a higher price tag. Furthermore, whole grains, many of which contain gluten, have been linked to a reduced risk of increased blood sugar and cardiovascular disease.

Unless you suffer from celiac disease or true gluten sensitivity, there is no medical reason to avoid gluten.

## **MYTH #3 – 1200 CALORIES A DAY IS THE MAGIC NUMBER TO LOSE WEIGHT**

This old myth neglects the fact that all people are different. While the common conception is that less is better, there are many dangers in eating too few calories. Some of these negative consequences include a slowed metabolism, muscle loss, lethargy, ignoring hunger signals, body temperature dysregulation and more. Furthermore, eating too few calories can put a person at risk for malnutrition or nutritional deficiencies. Eating fewer calories can be even more problematic if a person is exercising or training intensely, further increasing the risk of nutritional deficiencies and even amenorrhea for women.

Calorie needs vary depending on a person's genetics, activity level and lifestyle. There is no blanket magic number of calories that results in weight loss for everyone, and chronically under-eating is not a healthy long-term solution.

## **MYTH #4 – YOU NEED TO EAT SUPERFOODS TO BE HEALTHY**

Superfoods — like chia seeds, maca powder and goji berries — won't cure disease or make you healthy, in and of themselves. While there is no standard criteria to be labeled a "superfood," those that are marketed as such are often overpriced and oftentimes difficult to find.

The truth is, you can get many of the same antioxidant and nutrition benefits from other nutrient-dense food choices, like salmon, blueberries, kale and oranges. You don't have to seek out spirulina or wheatgrass. In fact, if you're eating a healthy, balanced diet complete with lean protein, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and low-fat dairy, you're getting plenty of "superfoods" already.

While eating marketed superfoods won't hurt your health, relying exclusively on them won't protect you from chronic disease either. There are plenty of other widely available foods that meet the same criteria, and a wide variety of foods are encouraged to prevent nutritional deficiencies.