

Consuming Thoughts

by
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Having grown up in an era when nutrition science was in its infancy, many older Americans today harbor nutrition myths and misconceptions. This may be harmful, especially when exaggerated claims are widespread by the media, for such nutritional miracles as quickie diets or foods said to prevent or cure various ailments.

Increasingly, in recent years,

the media have bombarded us with so-called nutrition information. We have diverse and often conflicting advice, frequently from self-styled experts, on supposedly healthful and harmful foods and diets. It is all too easy to fall prey to inaccurate information, especially if you have decreasing interest in food. Cooking for one may be less challenging, for example, and physical changes

of aging sometimes affect the ability to taste salty, sour and sweet foods.

Here are some of the most common nutrition misbeliefs, misconceptions and nutrition claims — are they facts or fallacies?

- Vitamins and minerals give energy. They don't. Believing this, many senior citizens take potentially harmful and needlessly expensive pills or supplements, and avoid eating adequate amounts of energy sources such as carbohydrates and fats.

Approximately 37 percent of American adults take a daily multivitamin pill. Some even take extra vitamins and minerals as well, especially vitamin C. Yet most of these supplements are unnecessary for people of any age. A well-balanced diet should provide all of your nutritional needs. High doses of some vitamins, such as A and D, can be harmful. Large amounts of some supplements can upset the natural balance of nutrients normally maintained by the

body. Large doses, call megavitamins can act like drugs, with potentially serious results.

While researchers continue to learn more about how nutrient requirements change during aging, eating a balanced diet containing foods from the Food Guide Pyramid is the best approach to getting the nutrients you need. Before you decide to take a nutritional supplement, discuss it with your doctor or dietitian.

- Water is fattening. It's not. Fearing this, some people don't drink enough water. As we get older, reduced kidney function increases the need for liquid.

- Worried about too many calories in carbohydrates, older adults often substitute fatty foods, not realizing such foods have more than twice as many calories per gram.

- Some foods can cure such problems as arthritis. False again. Eating a variety of foods helps provide what is needed in a nutritious diet, but some foods are

more "nutrient dense"; others are more "calorie dense." Absolutely no foods or diets have been proven to prevent or cure arthritis.

Men and women over 60 need two or more servings, daily, of milk or milk products. Consuming at least 1000 mg of calcium per day may help to prevent osteoporosis, which can lead to spontaneous bone fractures. Nutritionally balanced meals are important, including foods rich in iron and those that increase iron absorption, such as oranges and other foods rich in Vitamin C.

Work hard to overcome any decreasing interest in food. Plan attractive and varied meals, set a pretty table, and try eating by a window. If you live alone, whenever possible invite a friend to share the cooking or at least the food.

Finally, take nutrition advice only from reliable sources, such as a public health nutritionist, a registered dietitian, or your county extension home economist.

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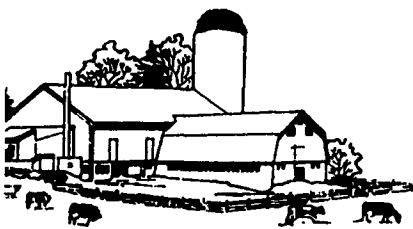
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