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Health

Food facts and fiction

Don't swallow mealtime myths

By RACHEL GRIMMAN

FORGET what your mother told you about how to eat right.

When it comes to losing weight and eating healthfully, much of what you think you know can be drastically wrong.

With the help of nutritionist Heather Greenbaum, founder of Nu-Train nutritional counseling center in New York City, we've uncovered the biggest diet myths.

MYTH: If you eat late at night, the food turns straight into fat.

FACT: It's how many calories you eat — not when you eat them — that counts.

A recent study conducted at the Oregon Health & Science University found no link between when animals ate and whether they put on weight.

What's more, a government study found that whether overweight women consumed 70 per-

cent of their calories before noon or closer to dinner time, the timing didn't affect their body fat.

But before you launch a midnight raid of your fridge, remember that eating late can cause indigestion and heartburn, keeping you tossing and turning in bed.

MYTH: Foods like grapefruit, celery or ice-cold water can burn fat and calories.

FACT: No food can burn fat. (If only!)

Some foods with caffeine may speed up your metabolism, but they don't cause weight loss.

You need to work off a whopping 3,500 calories to lose just one pound, so chomping on a celery stalk just won't cut it.

What's more, drinking water that is ice cold doesn't use up any more calories than water at

room temperature. "There's no way around it: The best way to shed pounds is to reduce the number of calories you consume and increase the number you burn off."

MYTH: Raw vegetables are better than cooked.

FACT: Cooking carrots and tomatoes helps to release cancer-fighting substances called carotenoids and lycopene, so the body can absorb them more easily.

In fact, packaged, heat-processed tomato products such as spaghetti sauce can deliver six times more lycopene than the equivalent amount of fresh tomatoes, according to the American Dietetic Association.

What's more, some beans such as red kidney beans contain natural toxins, which can cause diarrhea if the beans aren't cooked properly. Boiling them for 20 minutes makes the food safe to eat.

MYTH: Fresh fruits and vegetables are more nutritious than frozen, dried or canned.

FACT: Frozen, canned and dried produce can be just as healthy as fresh, if not more so, says the ADA.

Frozen or canned produce is often packaged right after it has been picked, which helps keep most of its vitamins and minerals intact.

You can reduce the calories by picking canned fruit in water, rather than syrup, and choosing canned vegetables labeled



A view from the fridge: Not everything in there is as bad — or good — for you as you think.

Cathy Wang

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"no salt added."

Dried fruit such as raisins, dates and figs also contain healthy nutrients, except for vitamin C, which is found in fresh fruit.

MYTH: Boiling vegetables is better than microwaving them.

FACT: The longer you cook your food, the more nutrients it can lose.

You need to work off 3,500 calories to lose one pound, so chomping on a celery stalk just won't cut it.

Since microwaving is lightning-fast, vegetables can hold onto their vitamins and minerals better than with boiling.

Just be sure to make your veggies in a bowl with a little water in it so they don't dry out.

MYTH: Cravings are your body's way of telling you it needs something.

FACT: You wish. Cravings are, you're craving the pleasure and comfort you feel when you eat those foods — not a specific nutrient in them.

Also, people tend to crave foods that combine fat and salt — and there's no way the Western diet makes more of either one.

"I have clients who say to me, 'I want ice cream because I need calcium,'" laughs Greenbaum. "It's just not true."

MYTH: Any type of water is always better than soda.

FACT: Although regular water is calorie-free, some trendy vitamin waters contain as many as 100 to 125 calories per bottle.

Keep in mind that a 12-ounce can of Coca-Cola carries 140 calories.

What's more, Consumer Reports found that Gl-

meat-free dishes are loaded with sodium, fat and calories.

"To make vegetarian meals taste better, restaurants often add salt," says Greenbaum. "And the dishes are not necessarily lower in fat."

For example, two cups of vegetarian to meins has 546 calories and 29 grams of fat, she says.

Your best bet: Cook your own vegetarian entrees at home, where you can control the amount of salt and butter in your food.

MYTH: Nuts are evil and should be avoided if you want to lose weight.

FACT: Although nuts are high in calories and fat, most varieties have low amounts of saturated fat, which is linked to an increased risk of heart disease.

They're also a good source of protein and have no cholesterol.

"A small handful of almonds or cashews can be a healthy, satisfying snack," suggests Greenbaum.

About seven to 10 nuts count as a palmful, so don't go overboard.

For the record

TWO names were left off the credits for yesterday's "Haute Tot" story on Pages 37-39. The stylist was Laura Dotole and the model was Chanel Mayfarth @ Ford Models. I Post regrets the omission.