

## correcting common diet myths

With all the nutrition misinformation available today, it can be tricky to know what's actually true and what's false. The misinformation can make it especially challenging if you're trying to lose weight or eat healthfully. To help you separate myth from truth, read these insights from Milton Stokes, RD, nutrition writer and managing partner of Culinary Nutrition Consultants Inc. in New York City.

**[1]**

**MYTH:** All fat should be ban from the diet.



**FACT:** Fat is an essential nutrient for good health. Among other roles, it is used by the body to maintain proper temperature, protect vital organs, constitute cell membranes and produce hormone-like effects. In addition, fat is a dense energy source that helps you feel satisfied for longer periods of time (essential for dieters!). It is also vital for absorption of other essential nutrients.

That said, you should monitor the *type* and *amount* of fat in your diet. Studies have found that unsaturated fatty acids, like those in a mostly plant-based diet, may offer cardiovascular protection and prevent chronic disease. However, research has also shown the importance of limiting saturated and trans fat to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Varying your overall food intake is the best way to get adequate amounts of the healthy fats. "I recommend using a dab of extra-virgin olive oil with bread, instead of butter or margarine," says Rebecca Wright, MS, RD, LD, a clinical dietitian in Murray, Kentucky. She also suggests limiting the "bad" fats (meaning saturated and trans fats) and replacing them with nuts, seeds and healthy oils, such as canola and olive. How *much* fat is healthy? The American Heart Association recommends that your daily intake of fat should be around 30% of total calories.

**[2]**

**MYTH:** Carbs wreck

**FACT:**

A diet rich in

carbohydrates—particularly high-fiber items, such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains—is essential. Carbs are the body's primary energy source, and getting adequate carbs ensures sufficient energy for physical activity, metabolic function and repair. People who avoid carbs often need to resort to an artificial sweetener as an efficient energy source.

"It's best to aim for 50% of calories from carbohydrates," says Cynthia Sass, RD, LD, author of *Your Diet Is Making You Crazy* (Marlowe & Co.). Cutting carbs often results in poor endurance, muscle loss and dehydration, she says.



**[3]**

**MYTH:** To burn fat, it's best to exercise on an empty stomach.

**FACT:** Wrong. "An empty stomach is likely to cause you to fatigue more quickly when working out," notes Jenna Bell-Wilson, PhD, RD, LD, IDEA contributing editor and as professor in medical dietetics at State University. Becoming tired too soon can result in a suboptimal workout.

If you head straight for the gym before eating breakfast, this strategy can compromise your ability to work out at your optimal performance level. A better plan is first to eat a quick breakfast meal or snack that contains both protein and carbohydrates, such as whole-grain cereal topped with low-fat milk. ■



### the myth of night eating and weight gain

Does eating after 6:00 PM make you gain weight?

No. "There is no magic hour at which everything suddenly turns to body fat," advises Ellie Krieger, MS, RD, a New York City-based dietitian and author of *Small Changes, Big Results* (Clarkson Potter 2005). She says nothing is wrong with having a light supper or snack at night as long as you don't overindulge by eating more than your recommended daily calorie allowance.

However, many people eat too much in the evenings during sedentary activities like watching television. Make sure you are eating in response to true hunger and not for another reason, like boredom or loneliness.

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