

Live Healthy—Be Happy

A Practical Guide to
Nutrition & Exercise
for Maintaining
Health and Vitality

A Newsletter for the
Patients of Healthcare
Providers

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Food Myths and Marketing Tricks

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Shopping Tips

Buy foods from the outer aisles of your grocery store to find **nutrient-rich** fresh vegetables and fruits; dairy products; fresh fish, poultry, and meat; and the bulk food section, containing whole grains, nuts, and seeds.

Look for the words “100% whole wheat, rye, oats” or other grain to avoid refined carbohydrates that will raise your blood sugar levels.

When buying food in boxes or cans, choose those with the shortest ingredient list. The ingredients should be foods whose names you recognize rather than chemical additives.

Navigating the world of food has become trickier than ever. Food manufacturers spend millions of dollars on packaging to convince you that their specific products are good for your health.

Here are some common food myths and the real scoop on what is in those boxes and cans.

Myth #1 High fructose corn syrup is a healthy alternative to sugar.

High fructose corn syrup (“HFCS”), like sugar, is a rapidly absorbed form of carbohydrate. It raises your blood sugar levels quickly and promotes insulin resistance, which can lead to diabetes. HFCS contains “empty” calories; that is, calories that do not contribute nutrients that your body needs to maintain all of its daily functions. **Consuming foods and drinks that contain HFCS or other sugars contributes to weight gain.**

Myth#2 Butter substitutes are a healthy alternative to butter.

Most margarines and butter substitutes contain partially hydrogenated oils, which are essentially trans fats. Current medical research indicates that these fats are detrimental to our cardiovascular system, and the FDA has warned against consuming trans fats. Some of the butter substitutes are essentially made out of water, additives, and artificial flavors and colors. They contain no real nutrients.

What about butter? Made from milk, butter contains vitamins and minerals in addition to a variety of fats. Will smearing a little on a piece of toast harm you? Absolutely not. It is a much healthier alternative than the processed foods that are marketed as “healthy” substitutes.

Myth#3 Packaged foods labeled “low fat” are health foods.

The food industry has capitalized on the public’s concern that consuming high levels of saturated fat may contribute to heart disease. Packaged foods are labeled “low fat” in order to make you believe that they are healthy. The truth is that **these foods often contain large quantities of sugars and refined carbohydrates.** When we eat foods that don’t contain fat, we feel less satisfied. This is a perfect scenario for the food industry because it makes us want to eat more of the “low fat” cookies, candy, crackers, and energy bars that they are selling. Eating a lot of food containing sugars and refined carbohydrates sets us up for craving more of these foods.

Read the food labels on these foods to see how many grams of sugar are contained in one serving. Beware: **Just 14 grams of sugar = 1 tablespoon of sugar.**

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The many names for sugar in packaged foods:

Sucrose, dextrose, high fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, malted barley syrup, honey, molasses, agave, cane juice, cane syrup, maltodextrin, maple syrup, and corn syrup.

How much sugar is it okay to eat every day?

The USDA estimates that the average daily intake of sugar per person in the United States is 31 teaspoons! This equals around 500 “empty” calories each day.

There is no recommended daily limit on sugar intake. I would recommend that you treat foods with sugar as a minor part of your daily diet and substitute sweet-tasting foods like fresh fruit. This will help you maintain a healthy weight and healthy blood sugar levels.

Myth #4 The word “natural” on a box of food means that it contains healthy foods.

The food industry knows that health claims on food products sell foods, and that is why so many companies use the words “natural” and “healthy” on many packaged foods. These words have no agreed upon definition and can be used to describe a food that has been refined so much that it has no nutrient value, or to describe a processed food to which artificial flavorings, colorings, and other chemicals have been added. Read the ingredient list and the food label to decide for yourself if the contents of the box or can are indeed healthy.

Myth #5 Packaged foods labeled “low carb” are health foods.

The low carb craze has many people believing that carbohydrates are bad for you. In fact, carbohydrates provide the energy that your body needs to perform all of its functions. The problem is not eating carbohydrates, but the type of carbohydrate eaten. **Packaged foods labeled “low carb” often contain artificial sweeteners and flavorings that are not beneficial to your health.**

Myth #6 Juice drinks are a healthy alternative to sodas.

The food industry has found a way to disguise the fact that these drinks are very high in sugar. Many of these drinks are sweetened with fruit juice concentrate, which is made by processing fruit juice until it is basically sugar. Snapple, made with “100% juice,” has more sugar in an 11.5 ounce bottle than you will find in a 12 ounce Coke. **Healthy Alternatives?** Juices found in the refrigerated section that contain fresh fruit juice only. Dilute these with water to decrease the effect on your blood sugar level. Or, better yet, eat a piece of whole fruit, which contains fiber that will keep your blood sugars from spiking.

Tips for Reading Food Labels

1. Serving size is not necessarily the amount that you actually eat at one time.

Do you eat 2 cookies or 8 cookies at a time? Remember to multiply the numbers listed on the food label by the actual number of servings that you consume to see the true number of calories, sugars, and fats you are eating.

2. Sugar can be the ingredient found in the greatest quantity in the food even though it is not listed first on the ingredient list.

Food marketers know that consumers don’t want to see sugar listed first on the ingredient list because that indicates that sugar is proportionally the biggest ingredient in the food. If the product contains different forms of sugar with different names (see sidebar), they are able to list them separately. By doing this, no one form of sugar will be first on the ingredient list. Look at the total number of grams of sugar in each serving to get a better idea of how “sweet” the food is.

3. A food can contain trans fats even though the food label says it contains “0” trans fats.

The FDA allows a food label to say “0” trans fats if a serving contains less than .5 grams of trans fats. This means that .49 grams per serving allows a company to make this claim. How many servings are you eating? The FDA recommends that we eliminate trans fats from our diets because they are considered to be a cause of heart disease. Consult the ingredient list and avoid foods that contain partially hydrogenated or hydrogenated oils.