

MYTHS ABOUT FOOD

THERE ARE VERY FEW HEALTH TOPICS THAT POLARISE OPINION AS MUCH AS NUTRITION

● BY DR JOHN CUMMINS

THE PRINCIPLES of healthy eating should be neither confusing nor complex. And there are some myths about food and meal habits that need serious busting.

Current dogma states one must have breakfast but it seems some adults can work productively without it. While children should definitely eat breakfast as it boosts their concentration, there's no clear evidence that it does the same for adults. It's best to experiment and learn what works for your physiology. Just remember – if your concentration is flagging badly you might need to eat. The brain is an incredibly hungry organ: curiously it can only use glucose (from carbohydrates) as an energy source, not protein nor fat, like other organs. And although the brain only weighs about 2.5 per cent of one's body weight, its energy requirements are 25 per cent of the body's metabolic rate.

For some, skipping lunch will cause a drop in blood sugar level and a fall in concentration. You can also eat too much at lunch which can make you tired, as your body uses energy to digest the large volume of food ingested, diverting energy from the brain. Having "white" carbohydrates – white rice, white bread, non "whole grain" pasta and potatoes – causes a rapid increase in blood sugar level followed by a massive increase in insulin which causes an "energy dump" in the afternoon. A healthy lunch is massively plant based (salads, vegetables and/or legumes such as chickpeas and lentils or beans)



with a healthy protein such as chicken (or turkey) breast or fish, and maybe a wholegrain bread. Also, sedentary workers need to reduce portion sizes – less is more.

With the evening meal, we tend to "back fill" with excess calories. So again less is best. The Okinawans, from Japan's Ryukyu Islands, are one of the longest living and leanest ethnic groups on the planet. They generally stop eating when they are 80 per cent full – a concept we could embrace.

Whether overeating disturbs your sleep is an unknown, so experiment. For those with sleep problems, milk might be worth a try. It contains both calcium to help you relax and tryptophan, which can aid in sleep. If you need a good night's sleep, don't drink alcohol beforehand as it "switches on" the sympathetic nervous system so your body is aroused all night and sleep

quality is poor. There is no "best" diet for weight loss, they all work if you can stick to them. A recent article in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* shows an eating regime that reduces calorie intake will lead to weight loss. Eliminating two thick slices of bread a day (and keeping everything else constant) will lead to 1kg weight

loss a month, that's 12kg a year. Exercise helps "turbocharge" the diet but is relatively ineffective in weight loss by itself.

We know dehydration can cause fatigue so the general rule is 1.5 to 2 litres fluid per day, but there is no scientific evidence for or against this amount. Clear urine indicates you are well hydrated. Consider eliminating fruit juices unless you squeeze them yourself, as they are full of calories you don't need. Recent research suggests "diet soft drinks" can alter gut flora, causing a subsequent increase in appetite. Energy drinks should be minimised or avoided; they will give you a pick-me-up but there is generally a subsequent energy crash soon around the corner. The best drink is plain unfiltered tap water (there's no evidence that filtered water in Australia is any better for you). ●

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BUSTED

- SOME DIETS ARE BETTER FOR LOSING WEIGHT THAN OTHERS
False
- ALCOHOL HELPS YOU SLEEP
False
- WE SHOULD DRINK A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF WATER A DAY
True but we don't know how much
- YOU LOSE WEIGHT THROUGH EXERCISING
False
- EVERY ADULT SHOULD HAVE BREAKFAST
We don't know this for sure, best to experiment on yourself
- EATING AT YOUR DESK IS BAD FOR YOU
True