

Healthy food? Well, maybe not

Behind most food and nutrition advice is a nugget of truth but some of the tales we grew up believing are simply not true. Health writer **Estelle Ellis** separates the science from the silliness

DIETICIAN Cindy Chin says “healthy food” should really depend on each individual’s nutritional needs.

She said as a rule of thumb it was useful to check the ingredient labels on products. “The first three listed ingredients will give you a good idea of what the product predominantly contains. For example, if sugar is listed first, the sugar content will be high.

Yoghurt *Beware of sugar overload and other nasty ingredients*

Chinn said a cup of yoghurt contained almost a third of your child’s daily calcium needs, as well as other key nutrients like

protein, potassium, iodine and B vitamins. Two things that parents may be concerned about in yoghurt is fat and sugar content. When reading the product label, be mindful that the “total sugar” value includes both naturally occurring and added sugar – in yoghurt this may include lactose (naturally occurring), fructose (if whole fruit is added) and/or sucrose (added sugar).

Lifestyle coach Tanya Wyatt said one should be careful. “Most commercial yogurt is far from healthy as it contains stabilisers, thickeners and sugar (unless plain),” she said.

Dried Fruit *Beware of preservatives*

Chinn said dried fruit with no added sugar provided a compact and convenient snack option for school lunch boxes, and while fresh fruit remained the best choice, the dried option could be a great way to add variety to a diet.

Wyatt said dried fruit was very high in sugar, so should be eaten one or two pieces at a time. “When last did you eat

five or six peaches in one sitting? Also, too much dried food can be ‘sticky’ in the digestive tract, so be sure to drink water with it.

“Dried fruit is usually full of preservatives like sulphur that can cause a negative respiratory response.”

Peanut butter *Not all peanut butters are created equal*

Wyatt said the right peanut butter was an “awesome” food but consumers must be on the lookout for low temperature roasted peanut butter as this would maintain the integrity of the fats.

“Otherwise it is best avoided or eaten rarely.”

Fats and oils *should be used sparingly.*

Wyatt said she understood new nutrition studies to show that it was not fats that made you fat but carbohydrates.

“At your next meal, eat as many vegetables as you want and five tablespoons of

butter. Your cravings will be gone and you will feel energised and satisfied.”

She said fats were important for so many things, not least of which are that they provide energy, satisfaction and taste.

She said the newest thinking in nutrition circles promoted the use of coconut oil as there were some studies showing that it improved your heart health; boosted your thyroid; increased metabolism and promoted a lean body and weight loss.

Soy products

Soy may not be as good for you as you think

Chin said soy contained protein that included essential amino acids, fibre, numerous vitamins and minerals which were thought to provide health benefits.



HEALTH MYTHS: Seemingly healthy foods could contain harmful ingredients

“Soya has been investigated for benefit in terms of heart disease, decreasing risk for certain cancers, reducing menopausal symptoms, and osteoporosis. However supportive evidence is limited. Recently, soya has been the subject of a great deal of negative claims, but evidence remains unsubstantiated and controversial.”

Wyatt said consumers should know that “modern, unfermented soy foods like soy milk, tofu and other products

are marketed as health foods, but are actually extremely damaging”.

“Soybeans contain high amounts of digestive enzyme inhibitors, which interfere with the digestion of both the soy itself, as well as any other food that happens to be present in the digestive tract at the same time.

“Soybeans also contain high amounts of phytic acid, which blocks the intake of important minerals, such as iron, magnesium, calcium and zinc

(zinc controls iron uptake, so if zinc isn’t present and iron levels are abnormally high, liver damage can result).”

She said studies also showed that soy could cause red blood cells to clot, cause hormonal disruption and could lead to impaired thyroid health, fatigue and infertility.

Berries

There is no such thing as a super-food

“Berries are often touted as ‘super-foods’ in the media due to their high levels of



phytochemicals, which have been associated with antioxidant benefits.”

Chin said many dietitians agreed that there was no such thing as a super-food.

“Rather, it’s the overall balance of the diet that really counts, since no one food can provide all the nutrients we need to protect against cancer, diabetes and heart disease.”

Orange Juice

May be more than just Vitamin C

Chin said orange juice could be a valuable source of vitamin C.

“Keep in mind that they are a concentrated source of natural sugars; almost as much sugar as a fizzy drink. Too much fruit juice can contribute to weight gain. If you do choose to include it, preferably dilute it with water.”

Wyatt said freshly squeezed orange juice was fine in small

amounts. Commercial orange juice was usually heat-treated and then stored in plastic-lined boxes which leach harmful xenoestrogens (estrogen-mimickers) into the product.

“It’s no better than drinking fizzy drinks as there is no fibre present to slow down absorption rate of the sugar,” she said.

Chocolate

A few bits might actually be good for you, but you still can’t finish the whole slab

There are no good or bad foods if eaten in the right context and in moderation.

Cocoa contains flavanols associated with antioxidant benefits and are most prevalent in dark chocolate.

Research in this area is limited and many commercial chocolates have ingredients that add fat, sugar and kilojoules, with limited cocoa content.