

DO YOU KNOW YOUR FOOD FACTS FROM YOUR FADS? JULIA NEKICH DEBUNKS THOSE MYTHS IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH.

10 TOP food myths BUSTED

We've all grown up with food myths. Many have been passed down to us from our parents or grandparents; some may have been

exaggerated at school. Some of the myths of our childhood years were simple and quite silly (no, bread crusts won't make your hair go curly, and a watermelon won't grow in your stomach if you swallow the seeds).

Today, however, with our ever-increasing interest in health, many so-called food "facts" are health-related and are therefore taken quite seriously by a great number of people.

Here, we reveal the truth behind some common misconceptions:

1 CUTTING OUT SALT FROM THE TABLE WILL CUT OUT MOST OF IT FROM YOUR DIET.

Not true. "It's estimated that 75 per cent of the salt we consume comes from commercial foods – processed snacks, bread, butter and margarine," says Tania Ferraretto, spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA). Another 10 per cent is found in fresh foods, such as fish, meat and vegies; while just 15 per cent is added at the table. "So to eat less salt, cut back on processed foods or choose salt-reduced versions."

2 BREAD IS FATTENING. This is a myth, probably made popular by supporters of low-carb diets. The fact is carbs and proteins each contain 17 kilojoules per gram. If you want to lose weight, bread is one of the best foods to eat, as it's rich in carbohydrate – the easiest form of energy for our bodies to burn.

3 VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS PROVIDE ALL THE NUTRIENTS YOU NEED. Not true. According to the DAA, while supplements can be a short-term solution in conjunction with a healthy diet, they can never replace fresh foods.

"Supplements don't replicate important things such as antioxidants and disease-fighting phytochemicals," says Ferraretto.

"And some minerals are not well absorbed by the body in pill form. Iron is well absorbed in meat, but poorly absorbed in a pill. Calcium is another example."

4 FRESH VEGETABLES ARE MORE NUTRITIOUS THAN FROZEN VEGETABLES. Another myth! The longer the delay between vegetables being picked and eaten, the more nutrients they lose. Fresh vegies in supermarkets may be months old. Most frozen vegetables, on the other hand, are frozen within hours of being harvested and retain their nutrients until you defrost them.

5 FRUIT JUICE IS HEALTHY. Juice bars are on the rise, and they're making us healthier, right? Not so, say dietitians. "In population studies, the only thing that correlates with obesity is sugar-based drinks. These include fruit juices," says Dr Trent Watson, a DAA-accredited practising dietitian. "You need around four oranges to make one cup of fruit juice, so it's very high in energy. Then, some nutrients and all the fibre are squeezed out with the pulp. Fibre is cholesterol-lowering and manages your glucose levels. So fruit juice is not a replacement for fruit."

7 EATING FISH WHEN YOU ARE PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING CAN LEAD TO MERCURY POISONING IN YOUR BABY. Only raw and smoked seafood (canned is okay) should be avoided altogether, according to Choice Online. These can carry food-poisoning bacteria called listeria, which can cause miscarriage. But Choice says some of the most popular fish varieties, such as Atlantic salmon, squid, octopus, whiting, bream, snapper, trout and prawns, contain lower mercury levels and can be consumed up to three times a week. Fish with higher levels of mercury, such as swordfish and marlin, should be eaten no more than once a fortnight (and no other fish should be consumed during that time).

8 EATING AFTER DINNER ENCOURAGES WEIGHT GAIN. "Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, dinner like a pauper" – is there any truth to this? Dr Watson sets the record straight: "It's the total energy you eat throughout the day that's important. You can eat all your daily kilojoules after 6pm, and you won't gain any more weight than if you ate it earlier in the day. Weight gain occurs when you consume more energy than you expend."

9 FOODS LABELLED "BAKED, NOT FRIED" CONTAIN LESS FAT. "Baked not fried" is often used on packaging to indicate lower levels of fat in the product. But according to Ferraretto, many of these foods contain just as much fat – around 25g – as their fried alternatives. "Always check the nutrition information panel," says Ferraretto.

TOP 10 food myths BUSTED

6 MSG IS DANGEROUS. A myth. MSG (monosodium glutamate) is a derivative of glutamate, which is found naturally in a number of fresh foods and is produced by the body. MSG, a flavour enhancer, has been criticised for causing adverse reactions in some people. But Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) has established MSG as safe at levels typically added to foods. It found reactions are temporal, very mild and occur in less than one per cent of the population when large quantities are consumed.

10 IT'S UNSAFE TO REFREEZE MEAT AFTER IT'S THAWED. According to the Australian Food and Grocery Council, it is safe to refreeze meat if that meat is thawed in the fridge at 5°C or below. Most bacteria can't grow at these temperatures; the small amount of bacteria that can, grows slowly and is killed when the meat is cooked. But keep in mind that juices are lost with repeated thawing.