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Food Fact or Fad?

Cleora Ewalt

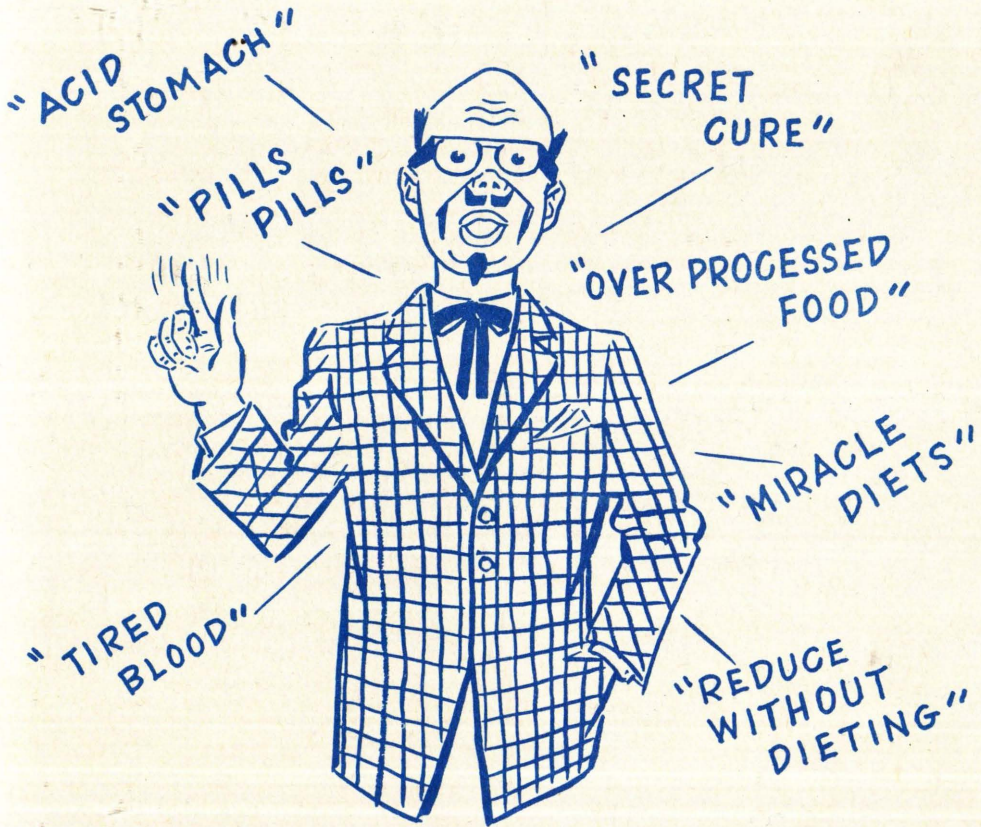
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Food FACT or FAD ?

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FOREWARD

Many South Dakota people have been asking for scientific facts concerning false or misleading claims being circulated about food and nutrition. The purpose of this bulletin is to provide facts to help combat some of the misinformation.

This information summarizes statements of leading nutrition and health authorities, and "watchmen" of the public health. None of the information is the findings of any research done by the author, nor does it contain any personal opinion nor conclusion.

The South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics expresses its thanks to the following for cooperation in reviewing the manuscript: Division of Home Economics and Department of Foods and Nutrition, South Dakota State College; Departments of Home Economics, University of South Dakota and Mount Marty College; South Dakota State Department of Public Health.

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Index

Big Business in Food Fads	4
Guardians of Public Health	5
Why Are We Taken In by Food Faddists?	5
How to Recognize a "Food Quack"	6
Favorite Themes of the Faddists	6
Other Types of Faddism	8
Fear of a Food or of Certain Foods	9
Fad Diets, Reducing Pills and Costly	
Reducing Devices	10
Fear of Cholesterol Fad	10
If You Want the Facts	11

FOOD

FACT OR FAD?

Cleora Ewalt, Extension Nutritionist

The alarming speed with which food fads are spreading across this country and the disturbing increase in food faddists and "quacks" has aroused leading authorities in nutrition and health in a combined effort to inform the public of the dangers of being "taken in."

People are keenly aware today of nutrition and the relation of wise eating habits to their good health. Unfortunately, the American Medical Association reports a variety of food faddists take advantage of this interest by posing as authorities and by spreading half-truths or misleading statements for their own gain. A flood of "scare" articles, books and other imitation-medical information on what to eat or not to eat adds to the confusion in the public mind.

BIG BUSINESS IN FOOD FADS

● About 10 million Americans in search of some short-cut to health are endangering their health and wasting over \$500 million each year for a great variety of vitamins, minerals and other food supplements for which false and misleading claims have been made, reports Arthur S. Fleming, Secretary, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

● Overweight Americans spend about \$100 million each year for so-called reducing aids which don't actually trim off fat, reports a committee in the House of Representatives in studying claims made by manufacturers of weight-reducing preparations.

The American food supply is unequalled in volume, variety and nutritional value, states the Food and Drug Administration in an article, "*Food Facts vs. Food Fallacies.*" It continues that we can easily supply all of our nutritional needs by buying them at a modern grocery store. In fact, many Americans have to go out of their way, nutritionally speaking, to avoid being well-nourished.

● The U. S. Postmaster-General says that the promotion of "quackery" through the mails is at the highest level in history.

● The American Medical Association (AMA) has been cooperating closely with the Food and Drug Administration and the National Better Business Bureau in an educational campaign to protect the public from this increasing danger.

Half a billion dollars spent each year is a fancy price to pay for these so-called food supplements, says the AMA. These products usually contain nothing more than mixtures of vitamins, minerals, exotic herbs, seaweed, alfalfa and dried vegetables. There are thousands of door-to-door salesmen, nation-wide advertisements, and phony "health" lecturers who promote their products in the manner soon to be described.

George P. Larrick, commissioner for the FDA, says: "One should distrust any suggestions for self-medication from unqualified persons, remembering that only a doctor is competent to diagnose and treat disease."

GUARDIANS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Food and Drug Administration enforces the Pure Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and other laws to promote the purity and honest labeling of foods, drugs, etc. It has the responsibility of keeping dangerous, impure, and dishonestly-labeled products out of interstate commerce. Manufacturers are required to state the amount of the ingredients on the labels. The nutrient content can be expressed in terms of the Minimum Daily Requirements, which were established by the FDA for labeling purposes. These Minimum Daily Requirements are the amounts of the nutrients needed to prevent symptoms of deficiency and to provide a small margin of safety.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has control over advertising that may spread false or misleading claims for foods, drugs, etc., sold in interstate commerce and the commission places checks on such claims when proved false or misleading.

WHY ARE WE TAKEN IN BY FOOD FADDISTS?

Food fads of some sort have been with us since ancient times. Beliefs in exaggerated good or harm of one food or another have continued even in this day of nutritional enlightenment. Tribal witch doctors and old-time medicine-barkers of frontier days are replaced by present-day food faddists, food supplement salesmen, and so-called "health" lecturers.

Great advances made in recent years in nutritional knowledge and its relation to health have gained public acceptance. Dramatic results from using this knowledge in medicine and animal husbandry have so won confidence that it is easy to believe that almost any pill, capsule, or tonic is a "miracle" drug. People are eager to get the best nutrition for themselves and their families. With the public in such a receptive mood, nutrition is a fertile field for those who use half-truths and misleading claims for their own profit. Names of some vitamins and minerals are so familiar that the product seems "right" if these words appear on labels—especially of widely advertised products.

People are impressed by salesmen who appeal to their vanity or fear of ill-health. They tend to believe things they see printed—in magazines, newspapers, and advertisements. Books, especially, seem to have much prestige, and there are many on the market by “food quacks.” People also tend to believe what they hear and see on television.

There have been remarkable scientific advances in foods in recent years, too: in new products and mixtures, new methods of preserving food, and in packaging and distribution.

Reliable food industries try to give accurate information and good quality products. Faddist promoters are therefore careful to avoid actions that might lead to law-suits, and use half-truths or misleading or false claims for their products.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A “FOOD QUACK”

The American Medical Association gives the following “earmarks” of the typical food quack:

- He uses a “secret” formula for curing disease.
- He guarantees a quick “cure.”
- He advertises or uses case histories and testimonials to promote his “cure.”
- He clamors constantly for medical investigation and recognition.
- He claims that medical men are persecuting him or are afraid of his competition.

Promoters may also vaguely mention authorities without naming them; for example, “Doctors agree that . . .” Overweight or chronically ill people are among the favorite targets. Writings of promoters or faddists are not found in professional journals. He or she has something to sell, whether it is a book, product, reducing plan, “health” lecture, or what-have-you.

FAVORITE THEMES OF THE FADDISTS

The Food and Drug Administration gives the following types of false or misleading claims made by food faddists. You can debunk these claims yourself if you know the scientific facts.

1. Fallacy (False Idea) That “All Disease May Be Due to Improper Diet,” with Variations.

The faddist may say that it is almost impossible for the average person to eat a completely adequate diet and that his product will supply the “missing” nutrients. His (or her) product usually contains a long list of ingredients, including those known to be necessary in human nutrition. He or she may also claim that the product contains “secret benefits which nutrition scientists have not yet discovered.” Other promoters may urge supplementing your daily diet with vitamins, trace minerals, and other nutrients on the grounds that they will improve your health beyond that of a well-rotunded diet.

The answer is that most diseases are not due to dietary deficiencies,

although good nutrition is vitally important to health. Deficiency diseases are rare in this country because of our plentiful variety of good food widely distributed. Food supplements are not necessary for normal persons who are eating an adequate diet. A poorly-chosen diet, bolstered by vitamin concentrates, might lack protein, calories, minerals or other vitamins or essentials not yet known to science.

There is good evidence from research that some nutrients may actually cause nutritional imbalance and be injurious if given in excess of body needs. There is no scientific support for indiscriminate use of vitamins in pure or concentrated form.

In choosing our daily diets, normal people need to be most concerned with these things: calories, protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins, A, C, D, thiamine, riboflavin, and niacin. Other known, needed vitamins and minerals are usually found in a good varied diet.

Vitamins are necessary to good health, but they don't themselves produce body tissues or energy. They are useless unless they have these things to work on: carbohydrate, protein, fat, water, oxygen, and certain essential minerals. The proper foods are vital to health; vitamins are necessary for best use of these foods.

Indiscriminate use of food supplements is undesirable because it destroys public confidence in what can actually be accomplished by sound nutritional practices. Deceived people may then ignore good nutritional habits. Vitamin pills and mineral preparations are valuable, in their proper place, and when advised by a doctor. Natural foods, however, may contain other essential nutrients that the pills don't have, and may be easier on the pocketbook.

2. Fallacy That "Overprocessing" Reduces the Nutritional Value of Foods.

Some processing and cooking methods may remove or reduce some of the vitamin and mineral content of foods. However, modern commercial processing methods preserve nutritive values or restore them to foods. Examples are (1) canning and freezing foods at their peak of nutritional quality; or (2) nutritional improvement of flour, bread, milk and some other products with added vitamins and minerals. Amounts of such additions are carefully calculated by scientific authorities to supply known dietary requirements. Success is shown by the fact that once-prevalent deficiency diseases such as pellagra and rickets are rare.

Homemakers can help to preserve these nutrients by wise choice, storage, cooking and serving methods.

Some promoters cash in on the "overprocessing" myth by false claims for various types of cooking utensils sold at greatly inflated prices.

Some faddists are against all processed or refined foods. Here are answers to some of the questions concerning some refined foods.

How do fresh, frozen and canned foods compare in nutritive value?

Raw foods vary greatly in their nutritive value, but high quality fresh,

canned or frozen foods are all good sources of the nutrients originally present.

Does pasteurizing milk destroy its food value?

Milk is important for its calcium, riboflavin and protein. Pasteurizing has little effect on these nutrients.

Health authorities recommend pasteurized milk for safety reasons. Raw milk may contain germs that cause septic sore throat, tuberculosis, undulant fever, and other infections.

Vitamin D added to milk helps your body to use the calcium and phosphorus. The occurrence of rickets has been greatly reduced by the use of vitamin D and vitamin concentrates for children.

Are whole wheat products more nutritious than enriched white flour products?

Both are nutritious. The B-vitamins and iron removed in the milling of white flour are restored by carefully calculated formulas in enriched flour-products. Nutrients from whole wheat flour are not absorbed as readily in some cases as from enriched white flour. For all practical purposes in a varied diet, these two products are considered by nutritionists to be approximately equal in nutritive value. Choose whichever tastes better and fits your purpose.

Are blackstrap molasses and honey superior to refined white sugar?

The nutritive value of blackstrap molasses is often overrated. The calcium, iron, and mineral salts in the molasses are due partly to contamination from metallic parts of the food processing plant. These nutrients are plentiful in a normal varied diet.

Honey has no special medicinal or curative powers. It has small amounts of vitamins and minerals, and is a concentrated sugar. Honey is not an important source of nutrients.

OTHER TYPES OF FADDISM

Crediting a Single Food or Group of Foods with a Special Quality or Power Out of Proportion to Actual Nutritional Content.

Some foods widely promoted in this manner are yoghurt (or yogurt), blackstrap molasses, wheat germ or wheat germ oil, brown or raw sugar, seaweed, and "live" honey. Many of these unusual foods eaten by faddists, although some are nutritious, are objectionable because of the increased cost. Yoghurt, for example, is fermented whole cow's milk and is more expensive than ordinary milk. Another example is the case of stone-ground flour bought at three times the price of regular flour. Some people grind their own flour. Why go to the expense of buying equipment when millers can supply you with nutritious flour at low cost?

There is hardly an expensive food that cannot be equalled in nutritive value by an inexpensive one. In fact, the financial burden of food faddism on you and the resulting impact on ethical industries are serious economic considerations.

Fear of a Food or of Certain Foods

Are certain foods harmful when eaten together, such as fish and milk, oysters and milk, milk and cucumbers, etc.?

No foods are known to be harmful as a result of being eaten together. Some folks may reject certain foods too quickly on the grounds that they can't digest them or are allergic to them. Sickness from foods tolerated by normal persons may have been caused by allergy or contaminated or spoiled food.

On the other hand, certain food combinations, such as cereal and milk, are recommended. The milk supplies the essential amino acids that are low in cereals and this helps your body to use the cereal amino acids.

Are the antibiotic dips used to increase shelf-life of poultry harmful? (Dressed poultry is sometimes dipped in antibiotic solutions to increase the storage or "shelf-life" of poultry on retail counters.)

Tests by experiment stations show that cooking destroys the antibiotic activity. If used, antibiotics are listed on the label.

What about "acidosis," "acid blood," and "acid stomach"?

The tissues and secretions of your body are either on the acid or alkaline side. Many fluids and tissues are on the alkaline side. Blood is weakly alkaline—it almost never becomes acid. Carbon dioxide is formed when food is "burned" in your body. It is changed into a weak acid when it enters your blood stream. Acids that accumulate in your blood are promptly neutralized and the alkaline character of your blood is maintained. Your kidneys dispose of acid products and prevent loss of alkaline substances. In this way, they help to preserve the acid-alkaline balance of your body tissues and to maintain alkalinity of blood and other tissues.

Your stomach is normally acid. The gastric juice contains hydrochloric acid, which delays or prevents growth of some of the bacteria entering your stomach in water or food. Its acidity is needed for the action of pepsin, which starts the digestion of protein.

Contrary to popular belief, sodium bicarbonate, which is alkaline, is of no use in treating a common cold.

Bicarbonate of soda or other soda-containing products are often used as alkalisers. Acidity of the gastric juice tends to grow less as age increases. Use of soda cuts down the acidity of this digestive juice and may interfere with normal digestion of protein and absorption of iron and calcium.

Most of the foods you eat form either acid or alkaline end-products. A combination of both kinds of foods is necessary for sound health. These foods are acid-forming: meats, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese and cereals. On the other hand, most fruits and vegetables, and milk to a small extent, are alkaline-forming. Tartness of some fruits, such as oranges, lemons, etc., is due to organic acids that later give rise to alkaline salts. Oranges, lemons, etc., introduce citric acid into the stomach, but alkaline products into the blood stream. With only a few exceptions, tartness can't be depended

upon as meaning that a food may be acid-forming. A diet containing all of the essential food groups will have both acid- and alkaline-forming foods.

Fad Diets, Reducing Pills, and Costly Reducing Devices

Fad Diets—Nutritionists and doctors agree that there is no easy way to lose weight, and that the best way to control obesity is to prevent it. When we eat more calories than our bodies use, the excess is stored as fat. Safe and effective reducing diets should protect your health while your body is “burning” the excess fat. Such diets would include ample amounts of milk, eggs, meat, vegetables and fruits, and less amounts of fat and cereals. Whether you’re reducing or not, include milk in your diet. It’s hard to get enough calcium or riboflavin for needs of your body without milk. Skim milk is often used in reducing diets because it has less calories than whole milk.

Many obese persons suffer unknowingly from other ailments, says the **American Medical Association**. The obese person is taking a risk in trying to reduce without a doctor’s guidance if he or she has one or more of such disorders as heart or gall-bladder disease, anemia or diabetes.

Many restricted diets are too low in calories or inadequate in nutritive value. Examples are diets limited to two or three foods. Others may have high sounding names to give the impression that authorities are backing them.

Skipping meals is a poor way to reduce, because you may choose unbalanced diets or increase your appetite for the next meal or for between meal snacks and thus end up eating more. Skipping breakfast appears to be almost a fad among teen-age girls.

Water can’t be changed into body fat—it has no calories. Your body is about 70 per cent water and you need water for health while reducing. Consult your doctor before deciding to cut down on it. Drinking water between meals while dieting helps to relieve hunger.

Exercises—Increased exercise along with reduced caloric intake may be advisable, but it is not necessary to follow costly reducing systems.

Pills—Doctors condemn unlimited use of pills for reducing. Drugs most commonly used in these pills are fillers or “bulk producers,” those that depress the appetite, and “metabolic stimulators.” These pills may turn your attention from the real problem—overeating—and be harmful in other ways. Some candies for reducing may have more calories than regular candy.

Fear of Cholesterol Fad

Is there a connection between fat, dietary cholesterol, and atherosclerosis or arterial damage? Best informed sources say the final answer is still not known. Cholesterol is present in many foods and is associated with some fats. It is also manufactured by your body from other substances. Until further research indicates any changes in our recommended dietary habits, leading authorities continue to advise normal persons to choose a

well-rounded diet from the Basic Four or Basic Seven. (*Food for Fitness—A Daily Food Guide*,” USDA, divides these foods into four groups, tells the nutrients for which each group is a good source and the best sources of certain nutrients within each group. It also tells how much from each group is advisable to eat each day. This leaflet is available from county extension offices.)

However, maintaining a normal weight is recommended as a definite help in preventing atherosclerosis. Perhaps many people should eat less fat to avoid obesity. Just how much fat is best for us is not yet known. But the Food and Nutrition Board, National Research Council, in a report, *“The Role of Dietary Fat in Human Health,”* states: “It is the consensus of nutritionists that the human diet should provide at least 25 per cent of its energy in the form of fat.” Studies of eating habits indicate that many of us are eating as high as 40 per cent of our calories in fats.

Some fats are necessary in the diet; they furnish certain unsaturated fatty acids which are regarded as essential. Fats help in absorption of carotene (from green and yellow vegetables) which gives rise to vitamin A in the body. Fats also aid in absorption of certain other nutrients. Fats are carriers of vitamins A, D, E, and K.

Fats are concentrated sources of energy. They supply about 2½ times as many calories as an equal weight of protein or carbohydrate. Some fat in your meals will cut down the amount of food you need to get enough calories for needed energy.

When you have enough calories from fats and carbohydrates, the costlier proteins won't be used for energy until your body building and upkeep needs are met. In this way, fats will spare protein for those building and upkeep jobs which fats and carbohydrates can't do.

Some fat is also needed to make foods more tasty. Fats have staying power to prevent between meal hunger because they leave the stomach more slowly than carbohydrates do.

IF YOU WANT THE FACTS

Food fads may be costly or harmful. This bulletin has summarized the most prevalent types. Before you go overboard for such fads, consult your doctor and nutrition teachers or specialists or researchers at recognized colleges or universities, or write to the State Department of Public Health. But get the facts—your best protection is to be well-informed.

You can get the scientific facts from these authorities:

1. Council on Foods and Nutrition
American Medical Association
535 North Dearborn Street
Chicago 10, Illinois
2. Institute of Home Economics
Agricultural Research Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Washington 25, D. C.
3. Food and Drug Administration
U. S. Department of Health,
Education and Welfare
Washington 25, D. C.
4. Food and Nutrition Board
National Research Council
2101 Constitution Avenue
Washington 25, D. C.
5. American Dietetic Association
620 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago 11, Illinois

