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Health experts expose nutrition myths

As thousands of Australians aim high with New Year's weight and health resolutions, nutrition experts are lifting the lid on some unhelpful nutrition myths that may be holding you back.

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) said an ever-growing number of Australians are taking on board nutrition tips from self-appointed 'experts', who have limited or no training in nutrition.

'These people have great intentions, but are confusing Australians about what to eat for good health. Think twice before taking on the advice of a celebrity or someone who has done a short course in nutrition,' said DAA CEO Claire Hewat.

Myth: Wheat is a dietary no-no

The evidence says . . . Grain based foods, such as wheat, rye, barley and oats, provide many important nutrients for the body and can help manage body weight. Grains provide essential vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, protein and dietary fibre, all of which are important nutrients for a healthy diet. Eating whole grain foods help people stay fuller for longer, which is good news for anyone wishing to lose or maintain weight. There is also strong evidence that eating foods made from whole grains is linked with a lower body weight, a smaller waist circumference and a reduced risk of becoming overweight.

Myth: Cooking with animal fat is much healthier for you

The evidence says . . . Animal fat is rich in saturated fat, and too much saturated fat increases risk of heart disease. The Australian Dietary Guidelines¹ recommend replacing foods containing saturated fats with foods that contain unsaturated fats. That means cooking with healthy fats such as olive oil, canola oil or sunflower oil. If you're watching your weight, choose cooking methods that don't need lots of fats and oils, such as microwaving, stir-frying or baking.

Myth: Coconut cream is a healthy alternative to cow's milk

The evidence says . . . Coconut cream is not a suitable substitute for milk nor is it a *healthy* food. Coconut cream does not provide the same essential nutrients as milk and it contains a large amount of unhealthy saturated fats, which have been linked to heart disease and diabetes risk. Reduced-fat and low-fat milks provide essential nutrients, like calcium, magnesium and riboflavin, with minimal fat and saturated fat. Coconut cream contains 19g of saturated fat in a 100g serve which is *23 times* the amount of saturated fat found in low-fat milk.

Myth: Legumes are a poor dietary choice

The evidence says . . . Legumes are an exceptional dietary choice, recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines. They are an excellent source of (soluble) fibre, which is essential for maintaining healthy bowels, and are high in protein, making them an ideal meat alternative for vegans and vegetarians. Legumes also provide high-quality carbohydrates, and have a low glycaemic index (GI) - making them perfect for helping to control blood sugar levels.

Myth: Base your diet around meat and animal foods

The evidence says . . . Plant food groups are more protective than animal food groups against chronic disease. That's the conclusion of a new review which looked at research from 1950 to 2013 investigating the link between food groups and chronic disease. This finding questions the credibility of diets that promote high intakes of animal-based foods at the expense of plant-based foods, like grains and legumes. Animal foods, like lean meat, poultry and fish, provide important vitamins and

minerals, and are healthy choices, if eaten in the right amounts. For example, the Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend a maximum of 455g of lean, cooked red meat a week.

Myth: Coconut oil is 'natural', making it a better choice

The evidence says . . . Coconut oil is no more 'natural' than any other plant-based oil. All oils have gone through a degree of processing to turn the whole food from which they are derived into an edible oil product. The biggest difference between coconut oil and other plant- or vegetable-based oils such as olive, avocado or macadamia oil, is that coconut oil contains about 92% saturated fat, which is linked to increasing LDL or 'bad' cholesterol levels. While coconut oil contains a 'healthier' type of saturated fat – Lauric Acid, known to improve HDL or 'good' cholesterol, the product itself still causes a rise in LDL and total cholesterol, which isn't good for heart health. Oils made from unsaturated fat sources such as avocado, olive and canola, help to raise the good and lower the bad cholesterol in our blood, making them healthier options.

Myth: Choose 'all organic', of course!

The evidence says . . . Both organic and conventionally-grown foods can provide all the nutrients required when included as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Neither is better or worse from a nutrition standpoint. The key is to eat a variety of foods, based on the recommendations of the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Many Australians are not eating enough of foods like fruit and vegetables so, regardless of how these are grown, the priority is simply making sure you eat enough of these healthy staples. So whether you buy organic or conventionally-grown food really comes down to personal preference.

'The advice that works for healthy eating isn't very sexy and hasn't really changed over the years, so it's easily drowned out by new fads in diet and nutrition,' said Ms Hewat.

The Dietitians Association of Australia, which represents more than 5,800 of the country's nutrition and dietetics professions, recommends looking for the 'Accredited Practising Dietitian' credential when seeking nutrition advice and support.

'Accredited Practising Dietitians, or APDs, have completed a minimum of four years at university studying nutrition, keep up-to-date in nutrition science through a continuing professional development program, and comply with DAA's guidelines for best practice,' said Ms Hewat.

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For further information or to organise an interview with a DAA Spokesperson, contact Jess Turner, Dietitians Association of Australia, on 0409 661 920.

ⁱ <http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/about-australian-dietary-guidelines>