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12 Pieces of Health Advice that Makes No Sense

By Dawn Yanek | July 06, 2020

Here's the age-old advice that you should ditch—and the tips that you should follow instead for optimal health.

Feed a cold, starve a fever

It's a catchy little catchphrase, but it doesn't withstand scientific scrutiny. Well, not all of it, anyway. **Elroy Vojdani, MD**, a functional medicine practitioner and the founder of Regenera Medical in Los Angeles, explains that the first part is sound. "When the immune system is battling an infection, it uses a tremendous amount of energy, and the calories from food intake can certainly help fuel the immune response and ensure a speedy recovery."

The second part, however, is where things go awry. "The amount of energy used to fight an infection goes up exponentially when a fever is involved," says Dr. Vojdani. "You, in fact, need *more* calories to help keep up with the energy depletion of a fever." The smart path, he says, is to consume healthy calories—but without overdoing it and stressing your intestinal tract. He suggests easy-to-digest, nutritious, and hydrating foods like bone broth, and adds that you should also make sure to drink plenty of fluids and get ample rest. Whatever you do, avoid these sneaky ways summer can make you sick.

Brown sugar is healthier than white sugar

All sugar, no matter the type, is equally problematic if you consume too much of it. "Brown sugar and turbinado (raw) sugar do have slightly fewer calories per gram and a small amount of minerals (mostly calcium and potassium) that are likely inconsequential," says Dr. Vojdani. "They do, however, have an identical glycemic index to white sugar, meaning that they have the exact same potential to do harm to



your metabolism.” He recommends sticking to sweeteners with a lower glycemic index, like coconut sugar, maple syrup, or agave syrup. And, in general, do your best to limit your sugar intake. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada recommends a maximum of 12 teaspoons of added sugar per day.

Gluten-free foods are healthier

Gluten-free foods aren’t inherently healthier, and, in fact, they could be healthier than you think. “The majority of gluten-free replacement products at the supermarket are made with ultra-processed grains and powders and contain large amounts of stabilizers and gums, which are undoubtedly bad for you,” says Dr. Vojdani. “Be mindful of this and choose products that focus on whole foods rather than processed ones and you’ll be doing the gluten-free diet the right way.” By no means does everyone need to give up gluten, but if you think that you have celiac disease—in which the protein in wheat, barley, and rye causes gastrointestinal issues, joint pain, and fatigue—or a gluten sensitivity, talk to your doctor about being properly diagnosed and devising a healthy food plan. Dr. Vojdani adds that some people with autoimmune diseases might also benefit from a gluten-free diet and suggests following it for four to six weeks to see if there’s an improvement.

You need to drink milk for strong, healthy bones

It’s not necessarily milk that does a body good—it’s calcium, and you can get that from a variety of non-dairy sources (though a glass of milk is an easy way to get a large dose of it). “Needing to drink milk for strong bones because of the calcium content is just plain false. There are tons of foods that are rich in calcium outside of cow’s milk: almonds, broccoli, chia seeds, kale, beans, and lentils, to name a few,” says Dr. Vojdani. “Choosing vegan sources of calcium can add anti-inflammatory properties to your diet and have the added benefit of being environmentally friendly.” So how much calcium do you need? According to the National Institutes of Health, most adults need 1,000 milligrams per day. Women over 50 and men over 70, however, should get 1,200 milligrams, while children’s needs vary depending on their age, with those between nine and 18 needing the most (1,300 milligrams). If you notice any of these signs, you’re not getting enough calcium.

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