

Common misconceptions about eating right

By Stu Yellin, Wnbf Pro Bodybuilder and Nutrition Coach

Many people go about their lives each day trying to make healthy or good choices when it comes to selecting what to eat. Some are basing their choices on a concern for their well-being and longevity. Others may be looking to properly complement their work in the gym and enjoy the aesthetic results that come from optimal nutritional support. The problem arises when we consider where most of the general population gets their information from, and exactly what notions they are operating under when they make the day to day decisions regarding their diets. While we can't expect a parent with a full time job to be up to date on the latest research published in nutrition journals, it's similarly unrealistic to trust mainstream media, and various ad copy meant to sell products to provide all of the information you need to make informed decisions for your unique situation. Hopefully I can touch on a couple of very common and prevalent mistruths that seem to be quite widespread these days, and are certainly not doing anyone trying to make good choices any favors.

One of the most misunderstood notions these days is the abundance of "Fat Free" or low fat foods. While I can applaud the people making conscious decisions towards what they honestly believe are better food choices, they have been sadly misled, or at least half informed. The reality of eating any food, comprised of any macronutrient (proteins, carbohydrates and fats), is that of calories. Despite what some media outlets might have you believe, it is never just one type of nutrient that causes you to get fat. If you overeat your daily calories each day, no matter if the surplus comes from carbohydrates, proteins, or fats, your body will create body fat from the excess. As such, just because a packaged product is billed as "Fat Free", it is still chock full of whatever calories it has, and contributes to your daily food intake.

A secondary angle is that when a macronutrient is removed from a food product, something else must usually take its place. So what we end up with in lower fat or fat free items are products that now have more elevated amounts of sugars in them. In most instances, this is not a better option for your physique, let alone your health!

With great frequency these days, we may also see claims to sell a certain item including some reference to the Glycemic Index. The general premise being that certain carbohydrate based foods will absorb quicker than others, and this can have a profound effect on blood sugar levels as well as certain fat storing hormones. Often times products being billed as containing "low glycemic carbs" scream out for attention at the supermarket. While the science behind the "GI" is indeed sound, what marketers of the latest magic dietary approaches often leave out is that it is only really valid when discussing only ingestion of the food being discussed in certain serving sizes. You might find a high value food like watermelon for example (GI of 80), and think you need to avoid it as it could potentially result in easier fat storage, only to later realize how large a quantity of watermelon you would need to create such a possibility. A second part of the glycemic index misuse is that more often than not, people eat several different foods in a sitting. Various carbohydrate sources may digest at widely differing rates resulting in varied blood sugar levels, but once you start combining different macronutrients (fats, proteins, and especially fiber), those rates all slow considerably! Suddenly you can witness what you were led to believe was a fast digesting carbohydrate source not only digesting slowly and leaving you fuller longer, but also not having a negative effect on blood sugar levels.

Still another concern that seems to be misused, maligned, and generally misunderstood is the concept of eating “clean” foods. I can’t even begin to recount how many times someone has prefaced a conversation with me by letting me know that they only “eat clean.” Unfortunately, the human body breaks everything down to its most usable components, and that means that the carbohydrates you ate in your oatmeal end up in the same tiny usable pieces as the carbohydrates I ate in my Pop Tart. This is a ridiculous notion to some people without a general understanding of human nutrition, and it does admittedly leave out the health angle involving various preservatives that are added to foods. The bottom line though, is that even eating all “clean” foods can lead to excess weight gain if you’re eating way more than you should.

No one needs to go out and get a nutrition certification just to lose weight, but always be aware of where your information is coming from. Understanding how marketers and the media mislead you is a great step towards discerning what you really need to do, and what’s just trying to sell products.