

Happy Holidays!

What a wonderful time of the year! Family and friends, parties and gatherings each bring us joy, fill us with memories, and create new ones. Many of us enter this season with plans to maintain or improve our health with attention to diet and exercise. Unfortunately, much information we are given is not based in science nor is it factual. This month let's explore some common health and weight beliefs and see which are valid as well as debunk some of the frequently cited yet erroneous ones:

True/False

1. The "acai" berry is useful for weight loss, increased energy and sexual performance, improved digestion, improved skin appearance, heart health and more.
2. Eating late at night will cause weight gain.
3. Avoid drinking coffee when trying to lose weight.
4. Inflammation is central to the development of cardiovascular disease.
5. "Eating healthy" is the most important step in a weight loss diet.
6. When trying to lose weight, weight lifting is not a good idea as it will make you "bulk up" and gain weight.
7. Eating red meat can be a sensible part of a weight loss plan.
8. Dairy products are fattening and unhealthy and should be avoided particularly when trying to lose weight.
9. Nuts are loaded with fat but they can be a valuable part of a weight loss diet.
10. Skipping meals can negatively impact weight loss.

Answers

1. False - Acai berries are the subject of a massive marketing campaign. In fact, I saw a car on Hwy 105 last week with a decal on the window stating "Ask me about Acai berries." (I have never figured out how to safely ask questions of another driver at 55 mph so I let it slide!) Much of the campaign for this Central and South American fruit includes fantastic claims with regard to weight loss, enhanced sexual performance, improved digestion and a myriad of other benefits. Unfortunately, little research has been done and dietary supplements aren't scrutinized to the same degree as prescription drugs even though as is the case with acai, health claims or curative properties are inherent marketing. While acai contains many antioxidants, I can find no evidence that the claims being made are true.
2. False-There is one caveat that I must include however. If eating late at night results in additional calories above the daily need, weight gain will result. Generally, our bodies process all food we eat in the same way regardless of the time of day we consume them. If calories in equal calories burned weight gain will not occur no matter the time of day we ingest them!
3. False-Coffee will not sabotage a weight loss plan as long as additions to the coffee (flavorings, sugar, cream, etc.) don't add calories to the coffee. Indeed, for many people the energy boost

from the caffeine can result in more activity and more calories being burned which can lead to even greater weight loss. Now some of us may have medical reasons to avoid caffeine, so I strongly suggest you consult your physician regarding your use of coffee.

4. **True-**Almost monthly evidence is found in well performed scientific studies demonstrating that chronic inflammation can lead to a variety of diseases including cardiovascular disease. Much of this can be reduced or eliminated with diet, lifestyle modifications and medications. Because inflammation can be so devastating to the body, please discuss this issue and your status with your physician. Some dietary tips to reduce inflammation include choosing healthy fats, increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids, drink more tea and up your fiber intake.
5. **False-**Daily I ask my patients who are trying to lose weight about their calorie counting. (We develop specific dietary plans for each of our patients which emphasize the importance of caloric restriction for weight loss while maintaining a healthy balance of foods.) Almost daily the a patient will answer the question with “I don’t count calories but I eat healthy.” Often when I explore the diet, I find that although the food choices are indeed healthy-complex carbohydrates, healthy fats and excellent sources of protein-the calories exceed the recommended number by 100 or more a day. For any of us, an excess of 100 calories a day from the number of calories we burn in a day will result in approximately 10 pounds of weight gain in a year. While I am for eating healthy, this alone will not result in weight loss and may indeed cause weight gain.
6. **False-**Weight training is a very important part of physical fitness. Although our muscles may grow in response, the increased muscle mass will result in more calories being burned because muscle is an active tissue while fat is not. Weight training has many benefits beyond weight loss and I suggest that this is a matter you discuss your physician.
7. **True-**Red meat eaten in moderation can be an extremely useful and healthy part of a weight loss plan for most of us. It is loaded with nutrients including iron and protein as well as others. Proper choices of red meat are important-lean cuts, appropriate serving size- but the stigma attached to red meat is not entirely deserved.
8. **False-**Low fat dairy products have been shown to be useful in weight loss diets. The reason for this is not entirely clear but there is evidence that the high calcium content may provide a boost in metabolism. Caution must be used in the choice of the specific dairy products but one should focus on low fat choices.
9. **True-** Although nuts are high in both calories and fat small amounts can be a useful addition to a weight loss plan. Nuts do have a high fat content but most of the fat is unsaturated or healthy fat. They also contain protein and fiber each of which can reduce hunger. Eat in moderation (about 1 ounce) and be sure to include their caloric count in your daily diet.
10. **True-**Skipping meals can result in increased and more difficult to control hunger later in the day or even awaken us from sleep resulting in “night eating.” Eating small amounts throughout the day increases one’s metabolism resulting in a greater number of calories utilized throughout the day, higher energy and reduced hunger.

Each of us at The M.D.'s Weight & Wellness Center (Joy, Julie Jennifer and I) wish each of you Happy, Healthy and Safe Holidays.