We Got the Eats!

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Happy Nutrition Month!

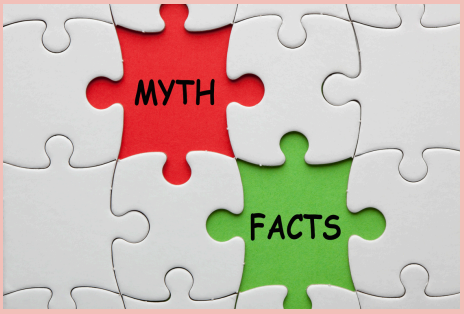
March is Nutrition Month, and this year's theme is "Food Connects Us." Food isn't just about what we eat—it's about the connections it creates. Whether it's sharing a meal with loved ones, exploring new flavors, or honoring cultural traditions, food has a way of bringing people together. This year's series will focus on debunking common food myths that often create unnecessary fear and confusion. Join me as we separate fact from fiction and promote a healthier, more informed approach to what we eat. Let's embrace the truth behind our food choices and the connections they help foster.

Fact Vs Fiction

Nutrition advice has evolved significantly over the years. One year, fat is vilified, and the next, carbohydrates are the focus of concern. With recommendations constantly shifting, it can be difficult to know what's accurate and what's not. As nutrition professionals, it's important to stay informed about the latest research and trends so we can sift through the noise and provide our clients with clear, evidence-based guidance.

In this issue, we'll address a few common myths I've encountered recently:

- Seed oils cause inflammation and are bad for your health.
- All ultra-processed foods are unhealthy.



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SEED OILS

Seed oils have recently become a hot topic on social media, with many influencers claiming they are inflammatory, break down into toxins when heated, and contribute to heart disease, suggesting they should be avoided at all costs. Common seed oils include canola, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed, soy, rice bran, sunflower, and safflower oils.

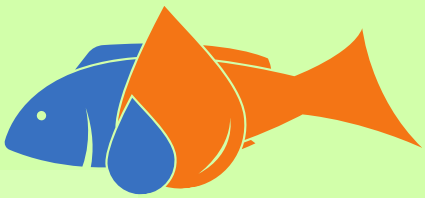
These oils are primarily composed of linoleic acid, a polyunsaturated omega-6 fatty acid. Omega-6 fatty acids are essential, meaning our bodies cannot produce them, and we must obtain them through our diet, much like omega-3 fatty acids. While linoleic acid itself is not inherently inflammatory, it can be converted in the body into pro-inflammatory molecules. The key factor is the amount consumed—specifically, the ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids. Ideally, this ratio should be between 2:1 and 4:1, but when it's unbalanced, as it often is in the typical Western diet, it can contribute to inflammation and chronic disease.

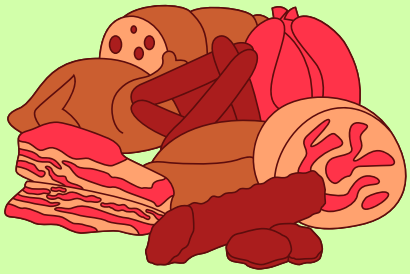
In fact, many Western diets lead to an omega-6 to omega-3 ratio of 10:1 or higher, with the excessive intake mainly coming from packaged foods. Rather than focusing on limiting seed oils alone, it makes more sense to reduce the consumption of highly processed foods that are often high in sodium, added sugars, and unhealthy fats which are the main contributor to the health risks rather than the seed oils alone.

Another concern often raised is the processing of seed oils, which typically involves the use of hexane. While trace amounts of hexane may remain, it's unlikely to pose significant harm to our health compared to the everyday environmental exposures we face. However, if you're concerned about this, there are cold-pressed versions of these oils available, which are processed without chemicals and may be a better option for those wanting to limit their exposure.

A 2021 systematic analysis of 19 studies found that diets high in saturated and trans fats were linked to higher mortality from all causes, including cardiovascular disease (CVD) and cancer. In contrast, diets rich in polyunsaturated fats—such as those found in sunflower oil, soybean oil, fatty fish, walnuts, and soybeans—were associated with lower mortality rates from all causes, CVD, and cancer. Additionally, diets high in monounsaturated fats, which are found in olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, safflower oil, avocado, and nuts, were linked to lower all-cause mortality.

The takeaway? Replacing foods high in saturated fats (like butter, fatty cuts of meat, and cured meats) and trans fats (found in shortening, margarine, and hydrogenated oils) with unsaturated fats (such as those in seeds, oils including see oils, fatty fish, avocado, and nuts) can reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, and inflammation. These simple swaps can make a big difference in supporting long-term health.





ULTRA PROCESSED FOODS

Ultra-processed foods have been a hot topic lately, often labeled as the "foods to avoid." But are they really as harmful as they're made out to be? Let's take a closer look at what falls into this category and whether they should be feared.

To help clarify, let's break down the four NOVA food groups. These categories will ensure we're all on the same page when it comes to understanding the different levels of food processing.

NOVA Group 1: These are minimally processed or unprocessed foods. Essentially, these foods have undergone simple processes like removal of inedible parts, drying, grinding, roasting, boiling, pasteurizing, freezing, or packaging. However, none of these processes involve adding salt, sugar, oils, fats, or any other ingredients. They're as close to their natural form as possible.

NOVA Group 2: These are processed culinary ingredients. They start with foods from Group 1 and are altered by industrial methods like pressing, refining, or extracting. The purpose of these ingredients is to be used in the preparation, seasoning, and cooking of Group 1 foods. Examples include oils, flours, and sugar.

NOVA Group 3: These are processed foods, which are made by combining Group 1 or Group 2 ingredients with additional elements like salt, sugar, or preservatives. These foods may also undergo preservation methods such as canning or fermentation. Examples include canned vegetables, certain dairy products, and some types of bread.

NOVA FOOD CLASSIFICATION

NOVA Group 4: This is where ultra-processed foods come in. These foods go through multiple industrial processes and often contain added sugar, oils, fats, salt, colors, flavors, and preservatives. These additives help extend shelf life, protect from spoilage, and maintain the food's original properties. Think of things like packaged snacks, sugary beverages, and ready-to-eat meals.

So, should we be afraid of ultra-processed foods? Not necessarily. A pre made protein shake, which is an ultra processed food will probably be a better nutritional choice compared to beer or wine which is a processed food. Understanding the different food processing levels can help you make more informed choices about what to include in your meals but ultimately reading the labels rather than relying on a classification is still your best bet.

While ultra-processed foods can be convenient, they're best enjoyed in moderation rather than as a regular part of your diet. Whole foods are typically the healthiest choice, but we understand that it's not always practical to eat this way 100% of the time—whether due to time constraints, budget, or other real-life factors. Rather than adopting an all-or-nothing mindset, it's more realistic to focus on doing the best we can at each meal. It's important not to stress too much about avoiding specific foods or ingredients. Labeling certain foods as "bad" can lead to unnecessary fear and may cause us to avoid them without a valid reason. A balanced approach is key to maintaining a healthy, sustainable diet.

NOVA GROUPS EXAMPLES

Group 1: Unprocessed or Minimally Processed foods	Group 2: Fats, Salt, and Sugar	Group 3: Processed Foods	Group 4: Ultra-Processed Foods
Peanuts, Nuts, and Other Seeds Without Sugar or Salt	Butter	Tomato Concentrates, Pastes or Extract, With Sugar and/or Salt	Alcoholic Beverages (Distilled) Such as Whisky, Vodka, Rum, Gin, Et etc.
Mushrooms (Fresh And Dried) and Other Fungi/Algae	Lard	Meat or Fish (Salted, Dried, Smoked or Cured)	Margarines and Spreads
Herbs (Fresh And Dried) and Spices	Honey Extracted From Honeycombs	Fruits in Sugar Syrup (With/ Without Added Antioxidants)	Pastries, Cakes and Cake Mixes
Vegetables, Fruits, Potatoes, and other Roots and Tubers (Natural, Packaged/ Cut/ Chilled or Frozen)	Oils Made From Nuts, Seeds, and Fruits, To Include Soybeans, Corn, Olives, Sunflower or Oil Palm	Legumes (Bottled or Canned) or Vegetables Preserved In Salt (Brine) or Vinegar, or By Pickling	Infant Drinks & Formulas, And Meal Replacement Shakes (e.g., 'Slim Fast')
Bulk or Packaged Grains Such as Brown, White, Parboiled and Wholegrain Rice, Wheat Berry, or Corn Kernel	Types of Sugar (White, Brown and Other) and Molasses Obtained from Beet or Cane	Canned Fish, such as Tuna and Sardine (With or Without Added Preservatives)	Dairy Drinks, Including Chocolate Milk

Click HERE for a more in-depth review of the NOVA food classifications and more examples!

FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope this issue has helped clear up some confusion and alleviated any unnecessary fear around certain foods. Nutrition is always evolving as new research emerges, so it's crucial to ensure the advice you're receiving is backed by credible sources. I always approach nutritional recommendations from individuals on social media—especially those without a formal background in nutrition—with caution.

When seeking nutritional guidance, it's essential to rely on trusted, evidence-based sources. This might include registered dietitians, nutrition scientists, or reputable organizations with a strong track record in health and wellness. Always ask for references and look for information that aligns with the latest scientific studies. By staying informed and critical of where your information comes from, you can make healthier, more confident choices for your body and mind. Remember, the goal is balance, not perfection, and every small step towards a healthier lifestyle counts.

I love hearing from all of you at Ext 4200 or via email at sdelarosa@luhonline.com! This month, I need your help. I'll be continuing this series throughout the year, and I'd love to know what nutrition advice you've come across recently that you're unsure about. I can dive into it and break it down in a future issue of this newsletter. Let me know! You know I can't leave you all without a delicious plant slant recipe, let me know if your thought if you try out the recipe!

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Chickpeas Alla Vodka

Protein and Fiber Packed Dinner that comes together in 20 mins!

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 3/4 cup chopped sweet onion
- 1 tbsp minced garlic
- 2 (15 ounce) cans no-salt added chickpeas, rinsed (about 3 cups)
- 1/2 cup no salt added tomato sauce
- 1/2 tsp ground pepper
- 1/2 tsp dried oregano
- 1/4 tsp crushed red pepper
- 1 1/2 cup of vodka pasta sauce
- 1/2 cup of half and half
- 4 cups of baby kale
- 1/2 cup of shaved Parmesan cheese
- 4 ounces of crusty whole wheat baguette, cut crosswise into 4 equal pieces, halved lengthwise and toasted

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Chickpeas Alla Vodka

Active Time: 20 mins Total Time: 20 mins
Yield: 4 servings

Instructions:

1. Heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion; cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and just starting to brown around edges, about 4 minutes. Add garlic; cook, stirring constantly until fragrant, about 45 seconds.
2. Stir in chickpeas, tomato sauce, pepper, oregano, crushed red pepper and salt; cook, stirring often, until chickpeas are warmed through, about 2 minutes. Add vodka sauce, cook, stirring occasionally, until steaming, about 2 minutes.
3. Add half and half; bring to simmer over medium heat. Stir in kale; cook, stirring constantly, until wilted and bright green about 1 minute.
4. Divide among 2 shallow bowls, top each with 2 tbsp of Parmesan. Serve each with 2 toasted baguette pieces.

Nutrition Facts: 1 serving (1 1/4 cups chickpeas mixture & 2 bread pieces)= 468 calories, Total fat= 16 g, Saturated fat= 5 g, Sodium= 688 mg, Carbohydrate= 57 g, Dietary fiber= 12 g, Total sugars= 0 g, Protein= 22 g

Notes:
Concerned about saturated fat intake, swap out half and half for some whole milk!
Want to eat less carbs, reduce portion of bread or skip it altogether!
If you can't find baby kale, use the baby kale and spinach salad mix or swap it with another leafy green of your choice!

References

1. Harvard Health Publishing. (2020, November 23). Seeding doubt: The truth about cooking oils. Harvard Health Blog. https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/seeding-doubt-the-truth-about-cooking-oils
2. Kim, Y., Je, Y., & Giovannucci, E. L. (2021). Association between dietary fat intake and mortality from all-causes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis of prospective cohort studies. Clinical Nutrition, 40(3), 1060-1070.
3. Oruçoğlu, B., & Işçi, G. (2022). Ultra-Processed Foods and Health. Current Research in Health Sciences, 2-10.

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