



## Food Fads and Fallacies

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The Texas A&M University System

15000  
2/22/78  
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1. "Natural nutrients are superior to 'synthetic' nutrients." **False.** The evidence accumulated over the many years since we have identified nutrients makes it obvious that a nutrient is a nutrient and a vitamin is a vitamin. The body does not know if the nutrient was produced in a laboratory or a peach. Many of the vitamins we use today are produced by the action of microorganisms—that is, bacteria produce them naturally.
  2. "Foods labeled 'organic' are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration." **False.** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not have an official regulation on organic foods. The FDA has been trying to identify what this term means to the consumers who are purchasing these foods, and also what areas of hazards and fraud are associated with this type of promotion. In general, the term "organic food" is assumed to mean that the product has been produced under conditions where pesticides and herbicides have not been used, where the fertilization of the soil has been done with natural composting rather than so-called manufactured fertilizers, and where the handling of the product following its production has been without the use of any type of food additive. We need to remember that all food additives and pesticides are subject to considerable evaluation before they are permitted. Even so, some individuals still want food products that are produced without the use of chemicals.
  3. "An individual really has no way of determining whether a food was grown under organic conditions." **True.** In most cases, the individual seeking to buy organically grown food is at the mercy of the seller.
- Certification has been proposed in some areas. If so, the distributor must provide evidence to the state that the products were grown under conditions that would make them meet the state's definition of organic. The fraud aspect is very important because incorrect labeling of products as being "organic" results in their being sold for more. This does not mean that the manufacturer or producer of organic foods does not have some higher costs. He may lose more of his crop to pests since he does not use pesticides.
4. "There is no limit to the amount of pesticide residue allowed in foods." **False.** Government agencies carefully control pesticide use. Products are monitored, and those found to contain excessive levels of pesticides are seized and taken off the market.
  5. "Natural foods are always more nutritious than processed foods available in the supermarket today." **False.** Some processed foods in the marketplace may be less nutritious than the fresh products because they have been processed, as in the case of canned foods. But the same loss that occurs during canning also occurs if the raw food is cooked. Food is processed to provide us with a continuing supply over an extended period of time. The alternative is to eat only raw, uncooked products. But then we would have problems because only a few of the foods that we consume today are eaten in the raw, uncooked or unprocessed form. There are products that do not have to be cooked or processed before eating. But if we eat only the raw form, availability is limited in large measure by the growing season. To extend the availability of the product, it is canned, frozen or dried.

6. "There is evidence that vitamin C can reduce the number of colds or other infections." **False.** Controlled studies do not suggest that vitamin C promotes fewer colds. Large doses may have a drug benefit by modifying the symptoms of a cold. Runny noses and coughing may be somewhat lessened in some individuals when large quantities of vitamin C are taken.
7. "Vitamin E lives up to the recent claims of health benefits." **False.** The evidence for the benefits from vitamin E suggests that other than a very specific use at relatively low levels in the maintenance of certain body tissues, vitamin E does not provide added benefits. In extensive studies, it is virtually impossible to produce a deficiency of vitamin E in the diet.
8. "There is evidence that supplements of B-complex vitamins are of therapeutic benefit." **False.** With the exception of one of the B-vitamins—niacin, which has been used as a drug for certain types of heart and circulatory problems—the B-vitamins in large doses do not appear to provide any added benefits. At this point, massive doses of these vitamins cannot be looked upon as having specific benefits, nor can they be considered as proven means of treating disease.
9. "Excess amounts of vitamins A and D can be toxic." **True.** Vitamin A is one of the vitamins that can accumulate in the body. It is fat soluble and, therefore, can be stored in various body tissues, particularly in the liver. Excessive intake of vitamin A is toxic and can lead to several bizarre effects, such as bone fragility, changes in bone growth and development of some symptoms similar to those associated with certain types of brain tumors. Vitamin D is also fat soluble and can accumulate in tissues throughout the body. Excesses of vitamin D lead to excessive calcium absorption and the deposition of calcium in soft tissues, as well as to bone changes that are particularly dangerous in children and also occur in adults. Excessive levels can cause calcification of certain blood vessels and could be a factor in the development of heart disease.
10. "There is evidence that novel foods such as wheat germ, honey, molasses and other similar foods contain nutrients that are not available elsewhere." **False.** In some cases, they may contain a higher level of a particular nutrient than other foods, but this is true of many of the foods we eat routinely. Carrots, for example, are extremely good natural sources of vitamin A and some dairy products are extremely good sources of calcium. Each of these foods can provide some of the nutrients that would not be present in other foods, but they are not any more special than other foods in our diet.
11. "Fad diets can result in weight loss." **True.** Any diet that produces a calorie deficit is going to lead to weight loss. A good weight control diet has two purposes: (1) to provide weight reduction without causing excessive trauma to the individual, and (2) to help the individual achieve some control once body weight is reduced. Fad diets are effective in the area of temporary weight loss, but few, if any of them, reach the real problem of helping the individual achieve weight loss and the maintenance of a desirable weight after weight is reduced.
12. "Lecithin breaks up cholesterol so that it will not accumulate in the arteries." **False.** Lecithin is an emulsifier which occurs naturally in the body, but there is no evidence that it reduces the buildup of fatty substances in the arterial walls.

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