



**nz nutrition
FOUNDATION**

Committee for Healthy Ageing

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Welcome to Issue 22 of our Bulletin, updating you on issues of importance or topical interest relating to nutrition and physical activity of older people. In this issue, we look at some of the celebrity diets being promoted as life-changing! The old saying – “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!” should make us judge our own instincts and good sense.

THE NUTRITION MINEFIELD – MYTHS AND MAGIC!

In the 12th April edition of Sunday – (the Sunday Star Times magazine), one of the features was an article “**Powder Power**”, the story of Soylent, a liquid meal substitute invented by Rob Rhinehart, a 25-year old Los Angeles software developer. It claims to provide all the essential nutrients required to fuel the human body. It’s a powder, and combines macro and micro nutrients. Just mix with water and drink! Among the inventor’s claims is that we need amino acids and lipids, but not milk itself; carbohydrates, but not bread; vitamins and minerals, but not vegetables and fruit that are mostly water. Eating food, he contends, is an inefficient way to survive. He didn’t eat a bite of food for 30 days, but existed on his powdered mix, which besides saving him time and money, cured his dandruff!

Fortunately, associated with this article were comments from nutrition experts who rightly say that the food we eat is not just made up of essential nutrients; food has a wide array of other nutrients and non-nutrients that have been shown to have health benefits. In addition, nutrients work in combinations and interact – whole foods provide a balance of nutrients that we as humans have evolved on. Finally, we should acknowledge the place of food and eating in our psyche – it’s a symbol of all that’s good for us – socialising, loving and giving, health and healing.

But then, what is the impact of manipulating our prudent diet? The fad diet industry has been with us for years, and there are always new combinations and manipulations of macro-nutrients and promoting health gains. Celebrity endorsements of fad diets through glamour, fame and wealth promise the idea that food can be a magical elixir that can cure all ills, yet what they are selling isn’t usually evidence-based, reliable or healthy for most. <https://theconversation.com/quit-sugar-go-paleo-embrace-clean-food-the-power-of-celebrity-nutrition-38822>

THE PALEO DIET

This diet works on the principle that we should only be eating foods our ancestral forbears ate. Food groups that advocates claim were rarely or never consumed by humans before the Neolithic agricultural revolution are excluded from the diet. These include:

- potatoes

- dairy products
- grains, for example wheat, rye, oats, and barley, which make it a gluten-free diet
- legumes, for example, cooked dried beans, peas and lentils, and peanuts
- processed oils
- refined sugar
- salt
- Neither **alcohol** nor coffee is considered "paleo" as human ancestors could not produce these drinks.

Proponents of the Paleo diet claim that human metabolism has been unable to adapt fast enough to handle many of the foods that have become available since the advent of agriculture. Thus, modern humans are said to be maladapted to eating foods such as grain, legumes, and dairy, and in particular the high-calorie processed foods that are a feature of most modern diets. Proponents claim that modern humans' inability to properly metabolise these comparatively new types of food has led to modern-day problems such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. They claim that followers of the Paleolithic diet may enjoy a longer, healthier, more active life.

However, there is no convincing evidence or scientific logic to support the claim that adherence to a Paleo diet provides a longevity benefit. It also contradicts the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy New Zealanders, by promoting a higher fat diet, avoiding the important grains and legumes, and milk and milk products. It is not recommended as a healthy diet, and the British Dietetic Association has named the diet one of their worst top five celebrity diets for this year.

Look at this link from Bill Shrapnell for more: <http://scepticalnutritionist.com.au/?p=873#more-873>

DUKAN DIET

The latest **Dukan Diet**. "Without the Dukan Diet Secrets, losing weight can seem like an uphill task". This fad diet hit the UK in 2010 and the US in 2011. The British Dietetic Association listed it on its top five diets to avoid in 2014 (for the third year). They say 'The rigid Dukan Diet works by restricting food, so restricting calories. Initial weight loss will be fluid. Even the creator of the diet, Pierre Dukan, who, in 2013 was banned from practising as a GP in France, has warned of associated issues with the diet such as lack of energy, constipation (due to lack of fibre/cutting out food groups), the need for a vitamin and mineral supplement (due to lack of variety/cutting out food groups) and bad breath.' It's a complicated high protein, no/low carbohydrate (cf Paleo and Atkins diets), four-phase diet that promotes rapid weight loss. The aim of the diet is weight loss but this may be at the expense of nutritional quality. Expert reviewers (dietitians, doctors, and nutrition scientists) have scored this diet 3/5 for short term weight loss, and 2/5 for each of the following qualities: long term weight loss, easy to follow (it has lots of rules), nutrition (food choices are limited), safety, for diabetes control, and for heart health. The diet was ranked 24th of the 25 diets scored, with one of its drawbacks being that it makes it hard to get sufficient potassium, the mineral that's important for keeping blood pressure healthy. Followers of this diet complain about how difficult it is to maintain the weight loss long term, and to apply the maintenance phase, which includes one day a week of protein only.

DETOX DIETS

What about the **Detox diets**? A detox diet is purported to be a powerful self-healing tool. Proponents believe we are constantly being exposed to toxins in our food, water and environment. They say that while our bodies are equipped to remove them, our increasing exposure may mean that we can't do it optimally, which these alternative practitioners believe may result in tiredness, constipation, skin eruptions, struggles with weight,

brittle nails and other ailments. A detox diet allows our bodies to focus on self-repair by promoting the elimination of unwanted chemicals and environmental and dietary toxins from the body. These diets are based on eliminating many foods including animal products, wheat, gluten, sweeteners, soy, coffee and caffeinated beverages, animal products, most condiments, yeast, alcohol, food additives and preservatives.

In an on-line article from The Guardian, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/dec/05/detox-myth-health-diet-science-ignorance>, Edzard Ernst, emeritus professor of complementary medicine at Exeter University, says “there are two types of detox: one is respectable and the other isn’t.” The respectable one, he says, is the medical treatment of people with life-threatening drug addictions. “The other is the word being hijacked by entrepreneurs, quacks and charlatans to sell a bogus treatment that allegedly detoxifies your body of toxins you’re supposed to have accumulated.” He goes on to say that if toxins did build up in a way your body couldn’t excrete, you’d likely be dead or in need of serious medical intervention. “The healthy body has kidneys, a liver, skin, even lungs that are detoxifying as we speak. There is no known way – certainly not through detox treatments – to make something that works perfectly well in a healthy body work better.”

You can go on a seven-day detox diet and you’ll probably lose weight, but that’s nothing to do with toxins; it’s because you would have starved yourself for a week.

PROCESSED FOODS

Is our consumption of **processed foods** compromising our nutrition? Processed foods come in for a lot of flak these days – is it warranted?

Did you know that food processing began about 2 million years ago? Firstly our ancestors applied flame to food (cooking), then progressed to other methods such as fermenting, drying, and preserving with salt. This enabled a regular supply of edible food during leaner times. So food processing is not new, only more effective!

Most foods we eat are processed to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the characteristics of the product. They include washed and packaged fruits and vegetables, bagged salads; canned and frozen fruits, vegetables, meats and fish; bottled sauces, chutneys, jams and jellies; cake mixes, cereals (rice, breakfast cereals) and nuts; milk and juices.

Food processing is defined as ‘any deliberate change in a food that occurs before it’s available to eat’. This can be as simple as freezing food to preserve nutrients and freshness, or as complex as formulating a frozen meal with the right balance of nutrients and ingredients. Processing foods can make them safer – for example, heating foods in processing methods such as canning and pasteurisation can destroy harmful organisms. Processing fruit and vegetables at their nutritional peak by quick-freezing helps maintain qualities of freshness longer than if the unprocessed vegetable has been sitting in your fridge for a week.

Processed foods have an important place in our daily diets just as fresh foods do, and are included in the Ministry of Health Nutrition Guidelines. Processed foods such as extruded snacks, chips, biscuits, carbonated drinks etc. should be eaten only in moderation, as they can be high in salt, sugar and saturated fats and lower in dietary fibre.

Read more on <http://www.foodinsight.org/sites/default/files/what-is-a-processed-food.pdf>

ORTHOREXIA NERVOSA

This fairly new condition described by US Dr Steve Bratman, is characterised by an obsession with healthy eating. People with this condition, which is not an officially recognised mental health disorder, become totally obsessed with eating the right foods, and with the special qualities of individual foods, and have special strict rules around their diets. They spend hours of their day working out their menus. This condition affects men more than women; weight loss is not the goal (as in anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa). It's an extremely isolating condition, as sufferers cannot eat with other people, and the condition becomes self-perpetuating. Two bits of good advice are firstly: "rather than eat your sprouts (or kale) alone, it would be better for you to share a pizza with some friends". And secondly: "try to be a balanced food consumer with a 'mostly and sometimes' mantra".

Finally, the healthy diet message with which we are all familiar is not mind-blowing; it's not outrageous, it's not even really exciting. With so many "celebrity" diets being promoted these days, the potential for consumers to become totally confused about what to eat is high. Despite this, we need to look beyond the hype and do what we can in the kitchen with the basic healthy eating message, creating delicious and exciting meals that include a variety of foods that are essentially low in added sugar and saturated fat, moderate in protein-rich foods (from animal and plant sources) and high in fibre. It's easier and cheaper than following fad diets or buying expensive products for detoxing, etc. Most of us following a healthy diet plan should not require vitamin supplements, but for some, there will be a specific need, and this should be monitored and prescribed by a qualified doctor or dietitian. When unusual diet plans or products promise magic, be prepared to be disappointed! If you're using the internet, scope widely to find some independent and reliable reviewers on the issue you are investigating, or talk to your health professional.

Further reading "Selling Wellness" <http://www.viva.co.nz/article/beauty/viva-selling-wellness/?ref=nzhbox>