



Six nutrition trends you should know

You want to eat well and stay in shape. But will the latest nutrition trends help or just confuse you? Dietitian Matt O'Neill separates the positives from the pitfalls.

'Old people shouldn't eat health foods. They need all the preservatives they can get'

-Robert Orben

1. LOW-CARB BECOMES SLOW-CARB

Forget low-carbs! The new trend is 'slow-carbs', based on the concept of GI (Glycaemic Index). Hungry, frustrated low-carb'ers are turning to less processed, wholegrain cereals for food that provides sustained energy and is filling but not fattening.

Positives: Atkin's and the low-carb diet gurus have spawned a whole new range of lower-carbohydrate and lean, high protein foods. If you know what you're doing, you've now have more options to create the healthy diet you want. Carb-reduced pasta, pre-packaged '98% fat-free' deli meats and high-protein, low-fat shakes offer simple ways to cut calories and still eat well. Low-GI foods such as porridge, oat bran cereals, yoghurt and others can help you feel full before you eat too much.

Pitfalls: Sure, you may need to put a limit on how much carbohydrate you eat, but don't go low-carb. It's hard to keep your glycogen stores fuelled for exercise without enough carbohydrate. Just watch you don't overeat or over-drink low-GI products, for example apple juice, just because they have a low-GI logo endorsement on the package.

2. FAST FOOD BECOMES LOW-FAT

Fast food outlets have introduced lower-fat burgers and salads in response to demand for healthier choices.

Positives: Making the change from a regular burger to a lower-fat version will reduce the saturated fat that can raise your blood cholesterol. Ready-to-eat salads offer a genuine calorie saving and can represent one of the best on-the-go lunchtime options.

Pitfalls: Some new 'No more than 10% fat' menu items aren't necessarily lower

in calories. Flat-bread wraps in particular contain significantly more carbohydrate than burgers with light, fluffy bread buns and this can cancel out the calorie savings made when cutting the fat.

3. BARS BECOME A MEAL

Breakfast and snack bars offer fast nutrition for time-poor consumers, especially on the way to and from the gym.

Positives: There are a wide range of low-fat, fruit-based snack bars that are much better choices than the three C's – cookies, cakes and chocolate.

Pitfalls: Although many bars are low in fat, they often contain a lot of sugar. Some are one third to half sugar, and this means you won't save too many calories. And too many protein bars instead of fresh fruit means you'll miss out on a bundle of health promoting antioxidants.

4. MEALS BECOME DRINKS

Juice and smoothie bars provide liquid meals in a flash.

Positives: Vegetable juices offer a relatively low-calorie nutrient boost, packed with vitamins and antioxidants. Adding a banana and strawberries to a skimmed milk smoothie can top up your daily fruit serves.

Pitfalls: Fruit juice and dairy drinks can pack a lot of calories that slide down too easily. They enjoy a healthy image but may not be so healthy for your waist line. Serve sizes, some as large as 800 millilitres can provide more calories than the meal you would have eaten.

5. KIDS' FOOD BECOMES HEALTHY

Food companies are offering more calorie conscious kids' foods.

Positives: There's an increasing range of healthier foods, marketed in interesting and fun ways for our kids. Fat-reduced, tasty savoury snacks, fruit packs and calcium-rich

low-fat dairy desserts are good options. Even for adults, these are worth checking out.

Pitfalls: Some food companies continue to promote the idea that simply cutting fat makes food healthy for kids. Promoting a sweet treat as '99% Fat Free' ignores the high sugar content.

6. FOOD BECOMES MEDICINE

The line between food and drugs has blurred with innovative new food products known as pharmafoods, neutrafoods and just plain 'phood' (food and medicine).

Positives: These foods can offer real benefits, especially for people with specific needs. Products with enhanced levels of omega-3 fats, soluble fibre and a range of phytochemicals (beneficial plant chemicals) offer simple ways to boost your intake of specific nutrients that can be lacking in your diet.

Pitfalls: Without getting the basics of good nutrition right first, you might find it overwhelming to navigate your way through a supermarket that looks more like a pharmacy. And individual foods won't offer a quick fix for a poor lifestyle.

Our fast-paced lifestyle is reshaping the way we eat at an alarming rate. To make healthy informed choices, you'll need to slow down enough to read nutrition information on food labels and ask if it's not available. This will help you eat well into the future.

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