

Health Tips & News

The good news about "bad foods"

Some foods get a bad rap for no good reason. Take chocolate, beef, and cheese, for example - we call them naughty nibbles and blame them for our high cholesterol, heart problems, and widening waistlines. But are they really so bad for us?

Toronto-based dietitian Zannat Reza gives the lowdown on five so-called bad foods that are actually good for you.

Chocolate

Public enemy number one among the health-conscious may not be as harmful as we think, Reza says.

While chocolate's high in fat, calories, and sugar, she says, it also contains cancer- and heart disease-fighting antioxidants such as flavanol. Some researchers also speculate chocolate is a mood booster: it contains an amino acid called tryptophan, which the body uses to produce serotonin, the feel-good hormone.

Choose: dark chocolate: it's purer, less fatty, and most nutritious - melt it over strawberries, bananas, and other fruits

Avoid: supermarket checkout chocolate bars filled with marshmallows, nougat, and other fatty fillers

Eggs

According to Reza, it's time to get cracking. Eggs may be high in cholesterol, but they usually don't negatively affect the blood cholesterol levels of most people. People with heart problems or high cholesterol levels should talk to their doctor about how much they can consume.

Eggs are also low in fat and packed with essential vitamins, minerals, and protein.

Choose: boiled or poached eggs, which are low in calories or eggs served with whole-grain toast, fruit, or vegetables

Avoid: fried eggs served with bacon, sausage, ham, and home fries

Cheese

"Some people are concerned about the saturated fat levels in cheese, but on the whole, cheese is very nutritious," Reza says.

Cheese is high in calcium, protein, vitamin A, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc, and more, she says, and its bone-strengthening qualities help prevent osteoporosis.

Choose: hard cheeses such as cheddar and mozzarella - "they're flavourful, so you don't need a lot to enjoy it," Reza says or cheese with crackers or with fruit such as grapes, apples, berries

Avoid: processed cheese slices, low-fat and non-fat cheeses - they're less flavourful and we tend to eat more of them.

Beef

Many people have a beef with its high levels of saturated fat and cholesterol, but beef also contains 14 essential nutrients, especially iron, vitamin B12, and zinc, Reza says.

"Beef is important for brain development and for thinking clearly and functioning properly," she says.

Choose: lean cuts of beef with a minimal outer layer of fat, lean ground beef or grass-fed beef - it's lower in saturated fat and cholesterol, and higher in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids

Avoid: fatty T-bone and prime rib cuts or steaks slathered in butter and cream sauces

Nuts

Go nutty over nuts! They may be high in fat, Reza says, but it's monounsaturated fat - the cholesterol-lowering kind found in olive and canola oil. They also contain vitamin E and omega-3 fatty acids, which fight heart disease and high cholesterol.

"Eaten in moderation - a handful a day - nuts are very good for you," Reza says.

Choose: a handful of unsalted, dry roasted, or unprocessed nuts for a snack, nuts sprinkled on your salad, cereal, or yogurt or natural brands of peanut butter without sugar, salt, or other additives

Avoid: high-fat foods such as ice cream or brownies with added nuts

Quote of the Month

"A man too busy to take care of his health is like a mechanic too busy to take care of his tools"

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