

## Popular nutrition views analysed by Vitality experts: true or false?

### Social media examples

With all the diet and nutrition content online, it's hard to know what's fact from fiction 🤖  
Here are some common questions about healthier eating – with our science-backed answers: [Link to article](#)  
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With all the hype and misinformation swirling around wellness fads and social media, it can be hard to know what's true 🤖 Our Vitality experts are here to clear up common misconceptions and separate fact from fiction: [Link to article](#)  
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### Article

With the rise of diet and nutrition content online, it's sometimes hard to know what's fact and what's fiction. That's why we asked Tonja Dodd (MPH), Senior Health Strategy Analyst at Vitality USA and Dr Mosima Mabunda, Chief Clinical Officer for Vitality SA for some help.

Here's what they say we should focus on, and what information we should rather ignore.

#### TRUE OR FALSE:

#### Following the Mediterranean diet can help us live longer

TD: True. This one gets the Vitality stamp of approval. This way of eating is based on the traditional foods of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, like France, Spain, Greece, and Italy – and research suggest that people living in these regions tend to live healthier lives, with a lower risk of chronic disease. The focus of a Mediterranean diet is to eat more fruit and veg, whole grains, nuts and seeds, legumes and heart-healthy fats and to reduce how much processed, refined, sugary food you take in.

MM: And the many benefits of this type of eating are that it can help you maintain a healthy weight, help prevent conditions like diabetes, stroke and heart problems, reduce inflammation and even help boost your mental health. It really is a great option if you're looking to take some (easy) steps to improve your health. A big tip from me here is to flavour your foods using herbs and spices and ditch that saltshaker!

#### TRUE OR FALSE:

#### As long as I eat well, I will be healthy

TD: I'd have to go with false on this one. Of course, healthy eating is a cornerstone of health and we should be eating a variety of colours, textures and flavours to make sure we're both enjoying our meals and taking in all of the right minerals and nutrients. But, diet is just one part of healthy living. Our focus at Vitality is holistic and spans physical health (diet and exercise), sleep and mental health, and regular health check-ups with a healthcare provider.

MM: Indeed, there are multiple healthy habits we should focus on, and a great first step is to follow a healthy, balanced diet to nourish your body. As Tonja says, exercise is also critical for good health, and our new Vitality research on VO2 max shows that cardio fitness is a powerful predictor of your current and future health. Our advice here? Adults (18 and older) should aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise most days of the week. Children and adolescents should aim to do 60 minutes of exercise per day. Exercises should include cardio exercises, that will increase your heart rate and breathing as well as 2-3 strength training sessions a week.

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

**Frozen or canned fruit and vegetables have no nutritional content**

TD: This isn't true, and the American Heart Association actually recommends a combination of fresh produce, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables to help us meet the recommended 4½ cups of each daily. What's important here is your access to fruit and veg, so for example, if fresh produce is hard to come by where you live or perhaps seasonally it's less available, then canned fruits and vegetables are convenient because they tend to have a longer shelf life and may fit more into your budget, too.

MM: Plain frozen fruit and vegetables are a convenient and nutritious option. What's important to consider for canned fruits and vegetables, though, is the sodium and added sugar content. Make sure you're checking the nutrition labels on the packaging, and opt for those with the least sodium (salt). Also, choose canned fruit that is canned in water (when available) rather than fruit juice or added sugary syrups. We also recommend rinsing and draining canned food before eating it to remove any extra sodium.

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

**Healthier eaters have better BMIs and lower health claims**

TD: True and true. Data from about 170 000 Vitality households taken between 2009 and 2012 shows that members purchased up to 9% more healthy foods and 8.5% more fruits and vegetables when receiving a 25% cashback on healthy food purchases. What this means is that we see measurable health outcomes. In addition, our data shows a healthier grocery basket is associated with a reduction in health claims costs and 4.2% reduction in weight.

MM: This is central to the Vitality Shared-value Insurance Model. By incentivising our members around the world to eat more healthily, the tangible benefits to them personally are great, at the same time as being valuable to broader society – through fewer health costs and burdens on healthcare resources.

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

**All gut bacteria is harmful**

TD: This one is easy: false. Gut bacteria is very important for overall health. And you get helpful bacteria, too. In fact, there is extensive research focusing on the trillions of bacteria that live in your gut. Many physical and environmental factors can affect the composition of your gut microbiome, and diet is one of them. The types of bacteria in the gut have been linked to different mental states (like stress, depression, anxiety and fear) and mental disorders, suggesting that your gut microbiome can affect brain function and mental health.

MM: I like to say: trust your gut, it's your body's second brain. This is a sometimes-ignored part of overall health but has become increasingly important as researchers link what we eat – and the processes that happen during eating – to how healthy we are. As part of these intricate processes, we have bacteria in our gut: both good and bad types competing with one another. Good gut health happens when we have the right balance between helpful and harmful bacteria. Good bacteria feed on fibre, so focus on getting enough fibre, from fruits, vegetables, legumes and wholegrains. Fermented foods like yogurt can also promote good gut health.

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

**Being at home for the majority of your day creates unhealthy eating habits**

TD: Well, this can be true for some. But it's something you can actively work to fight against. When you're home, there's likely more easy access to food, boredom and emotional or stress eating. In these cases, you may find you eat more unhealthily – or more often – than you should. That said, if you prepare meals yourself, from scratch, using healthy ingredients you're far more likely to eat a well-balanced meal. I'd also suggest having healthy (low-calorie, high fibre, nutrient dense) snacks available (popcorn, sliced vegetables and fruit, unsalted nuts, etc.) because this can be a big stumbling block for people.

MM: If you work from home, or spend a lot of time at home during the week or over weekends, there can also be the temptation to order in and these types of foods are often high in unhealthy fats, salt and sugars. Wherever possible, I plan meals and snacks ahead of time to make sure I'm not making last-minute decisions about what me (and my family) are having for meals. When it comes to snacking, I keep unhealthy options out of the house and make sure to display the healthy snacks so that they are the easy option to grab.

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

**Social media is a great place to find nutrition tips**

TD: This one is more false than true for me. While I do love the cooking tips and recipe suggestions that my Instagram algorithm regularly feeds me, I've also seen some not-so-scientific viewpoints on diet and eating which can be misleading and even dangerous. In a survey conducted by MyFitnessPal and Dublin City University, findings showed that the majority of nutrition trends on the social media platform TikTok are not aligned with public health and nutrition guidelines. And even more concerning is how many people are influenced by what they see online when it comes to nutrition trends. Plus, when influencers are paid to promote certain products, diets, supplements – this is a recipe for disaster. Approach advice on social media with caution. There are some registered health professionals (like dietitians) on social media, so if you are following advice on these platforms, make sure of their credentials.

MM: I say false here. As a parent, it's important for me to have the right information for my own health, but equally so for my kids. We won't go into a discussion on the pros and cons of social media and health right now, but certainly what your children are seeing online plays a very persuasive role in their lives. Poor body image, fad diets, and even dangerous gimmicks with pseudo-experts touting the benefits need to be avoided. And that's why Vitality is here: to provide you with the latest scientifically researched and proven ways of building healthier eating habits for a longer, better life.

*For more information about Vitality's evidence-based approach that encourages and rewards members for healthier living, visit the [Vitality website](#).*