

NUTRITION TIPS FOR NEW YEAR

Habits backed by scientists and decades of research

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As a health reporter who has been following nutrition news for decades, I've seen a lot of trends that made a splash — and then sank. Remember olestra, the Paleo diet and celery juice?



Watch enough food fads come and go, and you realise that the most valuable nutrition guidance is built on decades of research, in which scientists have looked at a question from multiple perspectives and arrived at something like a consensus.

Here are 10 science-backed pearls to carry you into the new year.

1. THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET REALLY IS THAT GOOD FOR YOU

Decades of research support the Mediterranean diet — which is centred on fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, olive oil, nuts, herbs and spices — as one of the healthiest ways you can eat. Its heart-health benefits are numerous, and it has been linked to a lower risk of Type 2 diabetes, cognitive decline and certain types of cancer.

2. IT'S OK TO DRINK COFFEE ON AN EMPTY STOMACH

Some people may experience heartburn, but there's no evidence that drinking coffee on an empty stomach can damage your gastric lining or otherwise harm your digestive system, experts say. And there are reasons to feel good about your morning brew. Drinking coffee has been linked to a longer life and a lower risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

3. START YOUR DAY WITH A HEALTHY BREAKFAST

Mornings can be hectic, and it may be tempting to grab a quick muffin or skip breakfast altogether. But nutrition experts say it's worth prioritising that morning meal — especially if it contains a balanced mix of protein, fibre and healthy fats. It will fuel your day, and studies have found that those who eat breakfast tend to enjoy a range of health benefits, including a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

4. TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR GUT

Keeping your digestive system healthy and running smoothly can protect you from life's discomforts — such as heartburn, bloating and constipation — as well as lead to better overall health. Unsurprisingly, the best way to care for your gut is to feed yourself (and by extension, your gut microbes) well, by prioritising fibre and consuming a variety of plant-based and fermented foods.

5. YOU PROBABLY DON'T NEED PROTEIN BARS

They're often marketed as a health food or as essential fuel for athletic performance, but most protein bars are loaded with sugar. You're better off meeting your protein needs with whole foods such as yoghurt, nuts, beans or eggs, experts say.

6. GO EASY ON THE DARK CHOCOLATE

File this as one of the saddest nutrition news stories of 2023. Dark chocolate has some of the highest levels of lead and cadmium (heavy metals that can harm the body) when compared with other foods. Fortunately, you don't have to give up your dark chocolate habit entirely. Enjoying it in moderation — no more than about 28g per day, experts say — will keep your risk low.

7. BLENDING FRUITS AND VEGGIES WON'T DESTROY THEIR NUTRIENTS

Pureeing fruits and vegetables in a blender won't strip them of their vitamins, minerals or fibre. And, somewhat surprisingly, several small studies suggest that sipping your fruit in blended form won't spike your blood sugar any more than when you eat it whole. So go ahead and enjoy your smoothie.

8. COTTAGE CHEESE IS BACK

You might associate cottage cheese with fad diets from the 1970s, but it's a food that has stood the test of time. Cottage cheese was a breakout hit on TikTok last summer, and for good reason. You can eat it plain or use it as a versatile ingredient in both sweet and savoury snacks, and it offers an impressive array of nutrients including protein, calcium, selenium and more.

9. TOFU REALLY IS GOOD FOR YOU, TOO

In past decades, people have worried that tofu and other soy foods might be linked with cancer or fertility problems because they contain estrogen-like compounds. But studies have put those fears to bed, scientists say. In fact, research suggests that eating soy-based foods may reduce your risk of heart disease and even some types of cancer.

10. IT'S CHALLENGING TO SEPARATE NUTRITION MYTHS FROM FACTS

Myths about nutrition tend to linger in American culture and in our minds, leaving us confused and sometimes even anxious about our eating decisions.