

PREVENTION

WELLNESS

5 MYTHS BEHIND

RECENT FOOD HEADLINES

The boldfaced words make you want to click, but will all these things really make you sick? Read on for the truth behind these scary-sounding but overblown, oversimplified, or just plain false “news” items.



TRUNK ARCHIVE.

1
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PRESSREADER

MYTH:

Eating red meat is a direct route to dementia.

MYTHBUSTER

If the word “processed” were in there before “red meat,” that statement would be a lot closer to true. The study earlier this year that rang major alarm bells mainly came down on *processed* red meat, which includes hot dogs, salami, sausage, bologna, and bacon. After analyzing data from more than 130,000 people over 43 years, scientists found that the biggest processed-red-meat eaters (who averaged around $\frac{3}{4}$ oz of it a day, the equivalent of about half a slice of bacon or a quarter of a hot dog or more) had

a 13% higher chance of developing dementia than those who ate the least. They also had lower cognitive function and faster brain aging.

The study didn't explain why this was, but Jasmin Dao, M.D., Ph.D., a neurologist at Miller Children's & Women's Hospital in Long Beach, CA, points out that high levels of fat and sodium (processed meat is full of both) have been linked to poor brain health; diets high in saturated fat are tied to brain inflammation and poor cognitive performance.

As for burgers and steaks, there's no proven link to dementia, but red meat does have saturated fat (also bad for the heart), so it's smart to eat it only every now and then and choose the leanest cut possible—and make processed meat an even rarer pick.

WELLNESS

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MYTH :**You should avoid all processed foods.****MYTHBUSTER**

It's not so simple. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines as "processed" any foods altered from their natural state—even by freezing, dicing, and heating. So a bag of baby spinach and that Greek yogurt with no added sugar are "processed." It also includes canned fruit, veggies, and fish, which can be part of a healthy diet. Ultra-processed foods—generally defined as industrially produced foods with ingredients not found in people's kitchens—have been linked to a host of ailments, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. "Focus on the foods you want to eat more of—vegetables and fruit, 100% whole grains, lean proteins, unsweetened dairy, legumes, pulses, nuts, and seeds," advises Jaelyn London, M.S., R.D. "When in doubt about a packaged food, ask yourself, *Could I make a version of this at home?* Choose the products that come closest to that."

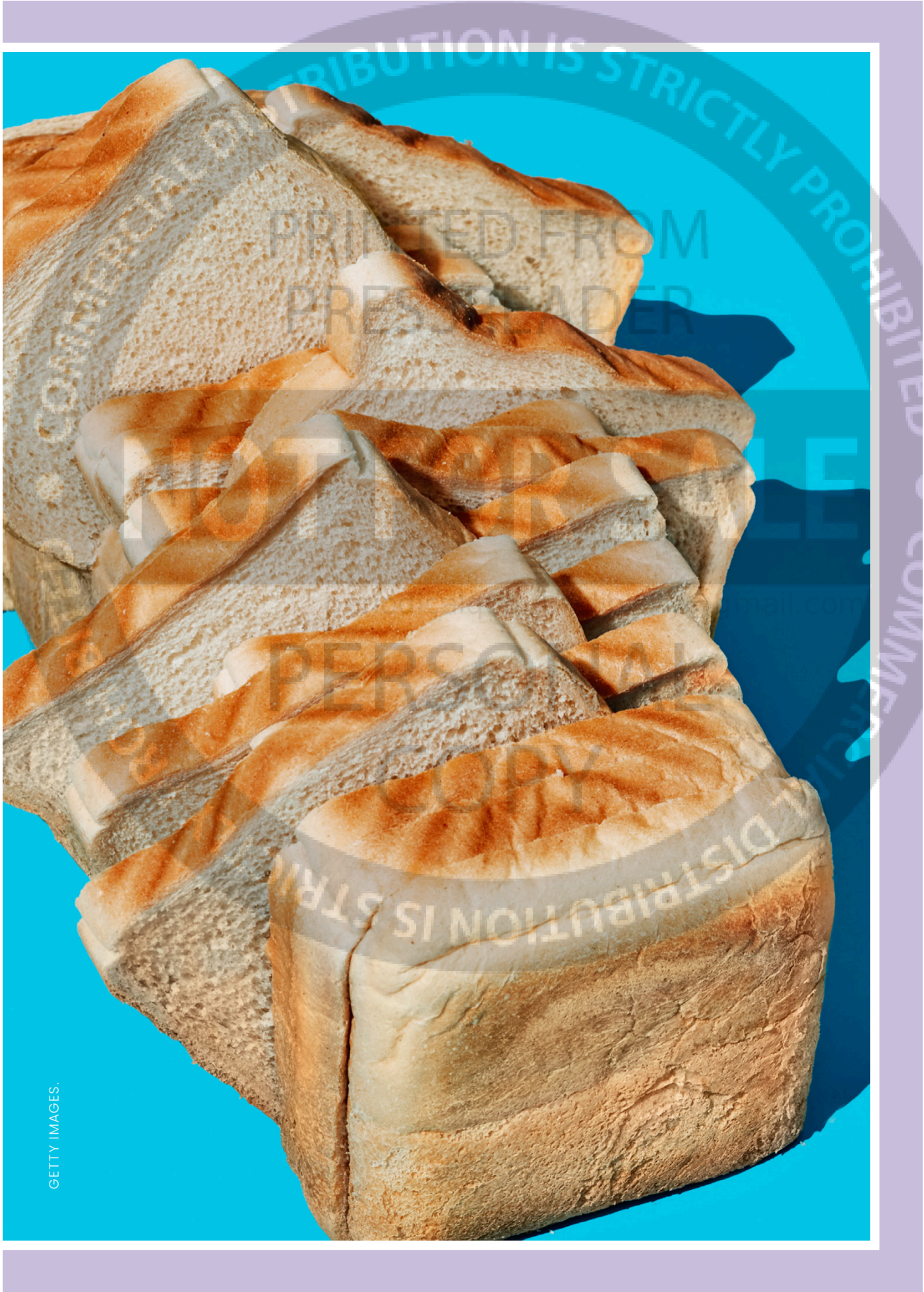
3

MYTH :**Seed oils up your risk of diabetes, obesity, and other diseases.****MYTHBUSTER**

Decades of research has proven seed oils' health benefits. They have omega-6 fatty acids, which raise inflammation risk when consumed in excess. But these fats also boost heart health and may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and some cancers, studies show. "Polyunsaturated fats like omega-6's play an essential role in the structure and function

of our cell membranes," says Alison Kane, R.D.N., of Massachusetts General Hospital. Simply have omega 3-rich foods (such as walnuts and salmon) to balance things out. And no, phytoestrogens in soybean oil won't throw off hormone levels, as

it contains "negligible amounts" of these, says Scott Keatley, R.D., co-owner of Keatley Medical Nutrition Therapy. Just avoid heating seed oils to smoking, as they can form harmful compounds (the same can happen with olive oil, which is not a seed oil).



GETTY IMAGES.

WELLNESS

4

MYTH:

Your favorite chocolate is full of harmful metals.

MYTHBUSTER

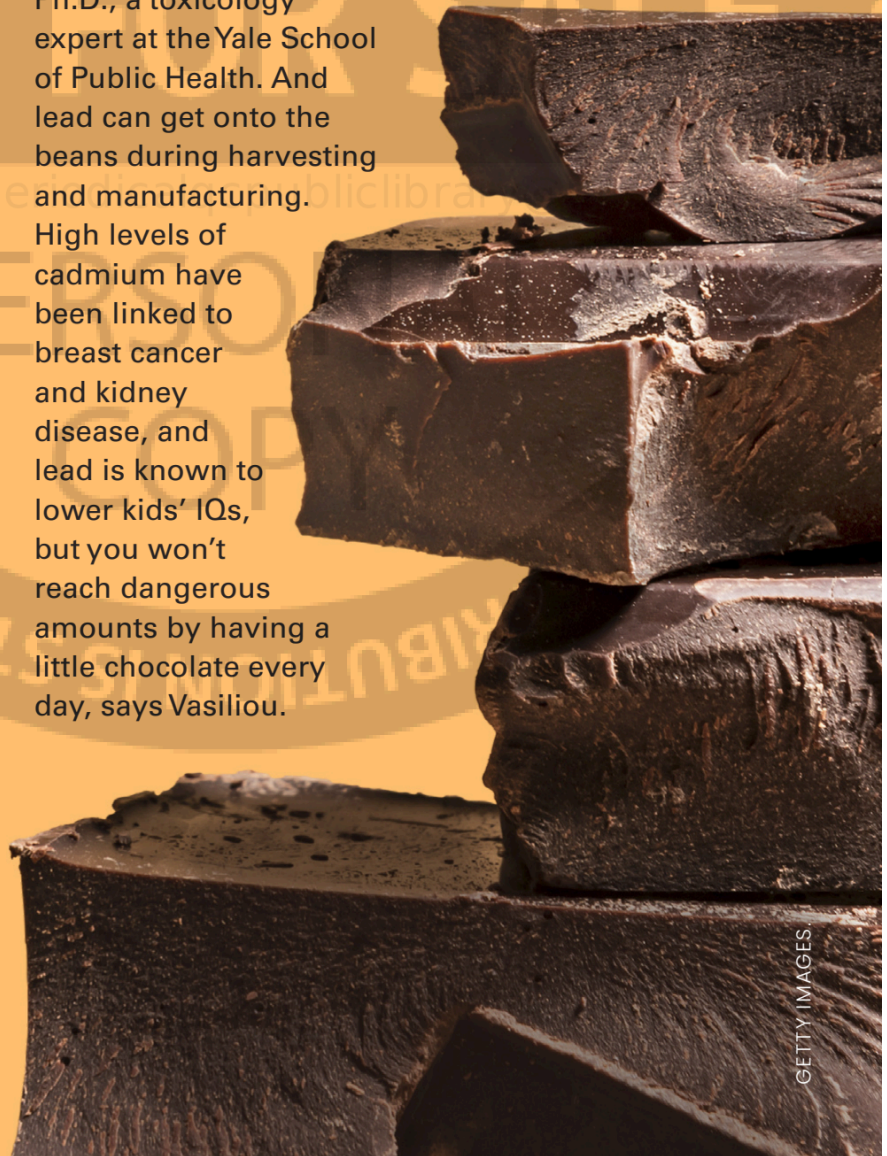
You'd have to eat tons of it to suffer any harm.

It is true that several studies by *Consumer Reports* and George Washington University found concerning levels of cadmium and/or lead in some chocolate products, including chocolate bars, brownie mixes, and cocoa powders. And yes, it's depressing to think that your cozy cup of hot cocoa may contain metals that could harm your health, especially after we've

heard for years that dark chocolate is good for us. But here are the facts: Cadmium winds up in these products because it is naturally found in the soil the cocoa beans are grown in, says Vasilis Vasiliou, Ph.D., a toxicology expert at the Yale School of Public Health. And lead can get onto the beans during harvesting and manufacturing.

High levels of cadmium have been linked to breast cancer and kidney disease, and lead is known to lower kids' IQs, but you won't reach dangerous amounts by having a little chocolate every day, says Vasiliou.

Because of the added sugars and fat in it, your sweet spot is about an ounce of dark chocolate a day, says Jeffery Tessem, Ph.D., a flavonoids researcher at Brigham Young University.



GETTY IMAGES

**MYTH:**

Bananas should not be used in smoothies.

MYTHBUSTER

The study on which this statement is based involved just eight guys. “Its small sample size isn’t enough to really tell us anything,” says Karen Ansel, R.D. What’s more, she says, “bananas have all kinds of health benefits, so there’s no reason to leave them out of your smoothies. They’re rich in potassium, a mineral we need for healthy blood pressure that

few of us get enough of.” So why all the social media commotion? The research found that when bananas and flavonoid-rich fruits such as berries were combined in a smoothie, the flavonoids weren’t well absorbed by the eight guys’ bodies. (Flavonoids are powerful heart-protective and anti-inflammatory compounds.) If these findings are replicated in larger studies, says Ansel, and you love your banana smoothie, simply eat more fruits that contain flavonoids throughout the day.

