

by mary jo blackwood, RN, MPH

MEDICINE IS INCREASINGLY COMPLEX, and what we don't know can hurt us. However, maximizing our health know-how is much more than working well with doctors. Fine-tuning our lifestyle and learning more about healthy choices makes us healthy, wealthy (beyond money) and wise.

[well aware: debunking health myths]

Despite bad science, those emails keep circulating that purport to "save your life because your doctor won't tell you this." Basing our health actions on faulty science can hurt us. Before acting on alarming health advice (or forwarding those destructive emails), go to snopes.com, a website dedicated to checking out urban myths, using reputable citations. Use the myths below to assess your health I.Q.:

EXERCISE MYTHS

[NO PAIN = NO GAIN] That saying should really read: No Pain=No Gain=No Brain, says Karen Precht of Pilates and Yoga Center of St. Louis. "We want people to exercise at an appropriate level for their age, physical activity and goals so they don't get hurt. Slow and steady with the right exercises will keep you in the game, not sidelined with aches and pains."

[STRETCHING IS A WASTE OF TIME] Precht says stretching lengthens muscles for a prettier look. "I don't know any woman who wants a short bunched body." At any age, flexibility should go to the top of the list to keep balance and the body functioning as it did when we were younger.

[YOU CAN'T LOSE WEIGHT WITHOUT HEAVY AEROBIC WORKOUTS] Not true, again. Thirty minutes at a moderate tempo, combined with strength training, will build muscle mass and rev up the metabolism.

NUTRITION MYTHS

[LOW FAT IS LOW CALORIES] We couldn't be more wrong, says Maya Bradstreet of *A Recipe for Wellness*. When processors take out the fat, they have to replace it with something, usually sugar, which contributes to obesity and insulin resistance.

[SATURATED FAT] Bad for you? Yes and no. "Monosaturated

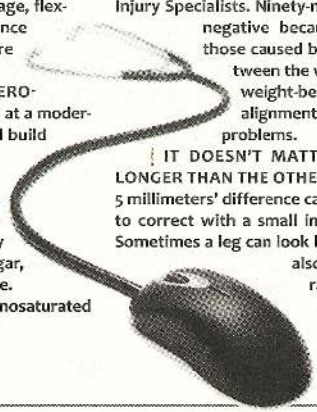
fats, such as those found in olive oil and avocados, are good for you in small amounts. Coconut oil, another saturated fat, is actually a short-chain fatty acid that lets our cells break off the carbon molecules and use them for energy. A tablespoon a day of coconut oil can actually help you lose weight and stabilize blood sugar. It's the long-chain fatty acids, like butter and lard, that cause the problem," she says.

[MILK DOES THE BODY GOOD] Not if you are lactose intolerant. People who have digestive distress, a diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), eczema or severe allergies may have lactose sensitivity. Bradstreet recommends incorporating other sources of calcium-rich food, like dark leafy greens (broccoli, kale and spinach), beans, and soy products like tofu.

PAIN MYTHS

[THE CAUSE OF BACK OR NECK PAIN WILL SHOW UP ON AN MRI] Often that's not the case, says Dr. Rachel Feinberg of Injury Specialists. Ninety-nine percent of the time, an MRI is negative because biomechanical pain sources, those caused by muscles, ligaments, or joints between the vertebrae, don't show up. She says, weight-bearing X-rays, which can detect misalignments in a standing position, can reveal problems.

[IT DOESN'T MATTER IF ONE LEG IS A TINY BIT LONGER THAN THE OTHER; NONE OF US IS PERFECT] Even 5 millimeters' difference can cause a world of hurt and is easy to correct with a small invisible plastic insert in one shoe. Sometimes a leg can look longer when we stand, but it could also be due to a tilted pelvis. An accurate diagnosis is essential.



donate for life

We all like to lend a helping hand, but have you thought about a helping pint? These facts from the American Red Cross may surprise you.

A single car accident victim can need as many as 10 pints of blood.

For each donation and an hour or two of your time, you can help three people.

Sterile disposable needles are used for each donation.

A healthy donor can donate blood every 56 days.

All donated blood is tested for HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis and other infectious diseases before it is released.

Type O-negative blood (7 percent of the population) is a universal blood type that can be given to people of any blood type.

If you began donating at age 17 and donated a pint of blood every 56 days by age 75, you would have donated 48 gallons of blood and saved more than 1,000 lives. Go to redcrossblood.org.

