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TOP 5 COMMON DIET QUESTIONS:

The Next Generation

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Spreading the goodness of nutrition is my passion. As the founder of the most visited online nutrition community run by registered dietitians with over 350,000 monthly readers, I receive a lot of diet-related questions from readers every day. Through the years I have clearly seen advancement in nutrition knowledge among the general public. A decade ago, readers asked about the health benefits of omega 3 and garlic. Now, questions are more in-depth and tend to fall into five main topic areas:

1. Is flax oil better than fish oil?



This is by far the most popular question. With the increasing popularity of vegetarian eating and mounting fears about mercury and PCBs in seafood, our clients often think that the vegetarian version of omega 3 from flax oil is superior to fish oil in heart health management. Although our bodies convert algalinolenic acids (ALA) into eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), the conversion rate is slow. In addition, flax oil contains a high concentration of ALA. Although still controversial, high intake of ALA has been linked to higher risk of prostate cancer. Until more is known, men are recommended to choose fish source for heart-healthy omega 3s instead of plant-sourced ALA.

2. Is (fill in the blank) more nutritious than white granulated sugar?



The blank can be honey, brown sugar, rock sugar, raw sugar, molasses, corn sugar, maple syrup, confectioner's sugar, cane sugar, evaporated cane juice, or any other sweetener. Some of the "natural" sugars are less processed and, hence, they retain a more robust flavour. Nutritionally, they are almost the same. They contain the same calories as white sugar and are metabolized the same way. Some natural sugars such as honey and evaporated cane juice contain minute amounts of minerals. Unless we eat

a gigantic portion of these "natural" sugars daily, the difference in mineral content is insignificant. One reader once asked about choosing a sweetened soy drink for someone with diabetes, believing that soy drinks sweetened with "natural" sugar were healthier. We suggest that clients focus on eating less sugar overall, rather than on the form of sugar on the ingredient list.



3. Is (fill in the blank) healthier than pop?



Again, the blank here could be diet pop, juice, energy drinks, milk, black tea, herbal tea, green tea, iced tea, sparkling water, tonic water, fruit smoothies, etc. Some drinks are marketed as energy boosters, mental boosters, or calorie burners. The latest green tea buzz has confused the general public; when a new iced green tea was introduced last year, we received many questions about whether this was a pop or a tea. Some drinks are good thirst-quenchers, such as low-fat milk, unsweetened tea, natural juice and bottled water. However, most other contain hidden calories or are simply water with artificial colourings and flavourings.

4. Is one form of calcium supplement better than another?



Calcium supplements are available in numerous forms: pills, capsules, enteric-coated pills, powder, liquid or chewable. They may be synthetic, "natural from plant sources", "naturally occurring from oyster shell", or "natural from coral bed". In addition, they may be acidic, alkaline or neutral in pH. They may also be bundled with vitamin D, magnesium, vitamin K, glucosamine sulphate or more. No wonder people are confused! The No. 1 complaint about calcium supplements we receive is about pill size; generally, we find that clients are using large pills because they are choosing products that contain more than simply calcium. We may advise clients to revisit their reasons for taking calcium supplements. If it is to supplement their diets with calcium, they ought to base their choice on the amount of elemental calcium. While added nutrients (especially vitamin D) may aid calcium absorption, it is important to determine whether the extra ingredients reduce the amount of elemental calcium or render them too big to swallow.

5. Is organic better?



The advantages of eating foods containing fewer chemicals, pesticides, and hormones are certainly appealing. A decade ago, organic was a term mostly associated with produce. This is no longer the case. Grocery aisles are filled with organic products as many packaged products have an organic version. Packaged products labelled organic are not always healthier, such as organic candy, organic chips, organic frozen pizza pockets or organic cola. In 2005, the organic industry reached \$3.1 billion in sales in Canada and is one of the fastest-growing categories in the food industry, growing at about 15 - 20% annually. We try to educate clients that overall food choice is more important, and that 3,000 calories from organic food is still 3,000 calories.



Biography



Gloria Tsang, RD
Founder & Editor-in-Chief

Gloria enjoys spreading the goodness of nutrition. She is an accomplished registered dietitian, committed to helping people lead healthier lifestyles through nutrition education and awareness. Gloria does not preach the ABCs of Nutrition, because she believes that in order for nutrition to have a positive impact on people, it needs to be fun and practical. She debunks diet myths and makes sense of breaking nutrition news so that readers will learn the essence of healthy eating. Gloria's articles have appeared on various media such as Reuters, NBC & ABC affiliates, The Chicago Sun-Times, Reader's Digest Canada, iVillage and USA Today.

Gloria founded HealthCastle.com as a hobby site in 1997 when a family member was diagnosed with cancer. Utilizing her wealth of knowledge as a registered dietitian, Gloria wrote and compiled cancer nutrition articles so that other families could benefit from the information as well.

Since then, the HealthCastle Nutrition community has grown into a robust nutrition resource library. Prior to managing HealthCastle.com full-time, Gloria worked as a Hospital Manager with Mead Johnson Nutritionals and a Pediatric Nutrition Specialist with Abbott Laboratories, Ross Products Division. Gloria is registered with the College of Dietitians of British Columbia, and is a member of the American Dietetic Association and Dietitians of Canada. She is a mentor for aspiring nutrition students through the Tri-Mentoring Program at UBC.

HealthCastle.com is the most comprehensive nutrition community run by Registered Dietitians on the web. We are passionate about spreading the goodness of nutrition and health. For more information, please log onto www.HealthCastle.com.

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