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News

Diet Detective: Sometimes 'good for you' can go awry

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By Charles Stuart Platkin Published: October 22, 2008 Updated: 09:10 pm

Even good foods can cause havoc in your life. Here are a few to keep your eye on.

Dried fruits

Problem: Exaggerate symptoms of candida and other yeast-feeding infections.

What happens: According to Jackie Keller, the founder of NutriFit and the author of Body After Baby: A Simple, Healthy Plan to Lose Your Baby Weight Fast (Avery/Penguin, 2006), "Dried fruits are a concentrated source of naturally occurring fruit sugars that can exaggerate symptoms of candida and other yeast-feeding infections." Candida albicans is a type of yeastlike fungus that inhabits the intestines, genital tract, mouth, esophagus and throat. Under normal conditions, this fungus lives in healthy balance in the body. However, certain conditions can cause the bacteria to multiply out of control. This can lead to a weakened immune system and an infection known as candidiasis. "There are a host of candidiasis symptoms that can include constipation, diarrhea, colitis, abdominal pain, headaches, memory loss, mood swings, prostatitis, persistent heartburn, severe itching, bad breath, and kidney and bladder infections. The disorder is often misdiagnosed, since there are so many symptoms," Keller said. Symptoms often worsen after eating foods containing sugar and/or yeast, including all forms of fruits and grains.

How much do you have to eat? "Everyone is different, so it's impossible to generalize, but I would think that ... having any more than twice what a serving size (or 2 ounces total) is supposed to be is having too much," Keller said.

Flax seed

Problem: Increased risk of prostate cancer.

What happens: Its high content of alpha-linolenic acids, or ALA, has made the ancient flax seed our modern miracle food, said Gloria Tsang, a registered dietitian with HealthCastle.com. "It offers a vegetarian alternative to provide omega-3 fatty acid and has been shown in many studies to offer heart-healthy benefits by lowering total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL or "bad") cholesterol levels. Flax seed may also help lower triglycerides and blood pressure and keep platelets from becoming sticky, thereby reducing the risk of a heart attack," Tsang said.

But a few studies have also linked high concentrations of ALA to a higher risk of prostate cancer. Until more is known, men who are not vegetarians are recommended to choose fish sources for heart-healthy omega-3s instead, Tsang said.

How much do you have to eat? As ALA is concentrated in oil form, it's OK for men to eat the actual seeds, but until more studies are done they should completely stay away from the oil form (flax-seed oil and flax-seed-oil pills), Tsang said.

Poppy seeds

Problem: Opiate-positive drug test.

What happens: Poppy seeds come from the poppy plant, which is the source of opium and other opiate drugs. "Sub-therapeutic amounts of opiates in the poppy seeds are metabolized in the same way as larger drug doses and excreted in the urine," Ramirez said.

How much do you have to eat? "Contrary to popular belief, the amount of poppy seeds on a bagel or a loaf of bread will not result in a positive drug test, nor will it excuse such a result," Ramirez said. "Poppy-seed strudel, if the poppy seeds are ground and sauteed in butter for several hours to make the strudel paste and then eaten in large quantities, may result in a positive screening exam. However, confirmation with a 2-mono-amino-morphine (2-MAM) test will make a drug-abuse-source evident. In short, enjoy your bagel, but don't expect it to protect you from a positive drug test," Ramirez said.

Asparagus.

Problem: Urine smells odd and takes on a slight green tinge.

What happens: "Asparagusic acid and thioesters in asparagus are excreted in the urine, creating the odor change and, when combined with other urine components, changing the color of the urine," Ramirez said.

How much do you have to eat? Even small amounts of asparagus can cause this effect. "This effect can be disconcerting, but is harmless and resolves in a few hours," Ramirez said.

Charles Stuart Platkin is the founder of DietDetective.com.

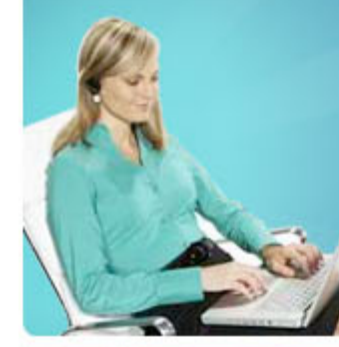
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