

# Family Friendly Factsheet

## Food Myths



There are so many food myths and fad diets out there, sometimes it's hard to know what to believe. Below are some common food and diet misconceptions explained.

### **Dairy products should be avoided**

The fat content of dairy produce varies between products; those high in fat are usually high in saturated fat, which should form a small part of the diet. However, there are many different low-fat versions of dairy products which contain the same amount of nutrients as their full fat alternatives such as low-fat yoghurt, reduced-fat butter and cheese and semi-skimmed or skimmed milk. Dairy products are a valuable source of protein, calcium and vitamins A, B<sub>12</sub> and D and avoiding them could lead to a deficiency in these nutrients. The calcium found in dairy products is easily absorbed by the body, meaning that dairy products are a valuable source of calcium which is especially important to growing children. Children under the age of two should be given whole milk and those under the age of five should be given semi-skimmed milk as skimmed milk does not provide a sufficient amount of calories for a growing child.

### **Avocados and nuts are not healthy options**

While avocados do have a relatively high fat content compared to other fruits and vegetables, they are a valuable source of monounsaturated fat which impacts positively on blood cholesterol. Nuts are also a good source of monounsaturated fats as well as essential fatty acids. Unsalted nuts make a good substitute for snacks which are high in saturated fat or sugar. This means that avocados and unsalted nuts are healthy options, however, eating an excess of any food high in fat can lead to weight gain. Provided there are no existing allergies or any history of allergies in the family, nuts are considered safe after six months of age. Nuts given to children under 5 should be flaked or crushed to avoid the risk of choking.

### **Carbohydrates are fattening**

Carbohydrate-rich foods are much lower in calories than those foods high in fat, with one gram of carbohydrate providing 4 kcal of energy and one gram of fat providing 9 kcal of energy! Low carbohydrate diets restrict the amount of foods such as bread and pasta and also the amount of fruit and vegetables consumed, which means that these diets are often lacking in vitamins and minerals found in fruits and vegetables and high in saturated fat. Carbohydrates provide valuable nutrients such as vitamin E, B vitamins and fibre, all of which are essential for a healthy diet. Instead of avoiding carbohydrates, they should form the basis of each meal, forming around one third of the diet. However, remember to watch the amount of fats such as butter or margarine served with carbohydrates!

### **Reduced fat products are always healthy**

While low fat alternatives contain 30% less fat, this does not mean they are always the best option. Often, these types of food tend to be high in fat and calories originally so although they have the fat reduced, this does not necessarily mean that they are low in these nutrients when compared to other foods. Also, even if a product has a reduced fat content, this does not mean it is low in calories, check out the recommended portion size and the amount of calories per portion and don't be tempted to overindulge – eating more of a reduced fat product could be the same as eating a portion of the original!

### **Red meat is always high in fat**

Many meat products such as mince or those containing pastry can be high in saturated fat, as the lean meat is blended with the fat. Trimming visible fat from meat or choosing lean cuts means that red meat can be relatively low in fat with between 4 and 8 grams of fat per 100 grams of meat. Lean red meat is a valuable source of protein and one of the best sources of iron, both of which are vital components of a healthy diet.