



# Nutrition Fact Sheet

## Separating Facts from Fiction - Series Three

**We are constantly bombarded with conflicting messages regarding food, nutrition and health in the media. But how do we separate what is fact from fiction? In this fact sheet, we follow on from the previous two series of 'Separating Facts from Fiction' and explore some more claims.**

### **CLAIM: I Should Quit Sugar.**

The effect of sugar on the body depends on the type of the sugar, whether it is natural or refined. Natural sugar is found in fruit as fructose and in dairy products as lactose. Foods containing natural sugar come with additional health benefits and are important in a well balanced diet; plus the fibre, vitamins and minerals in fruit and the protein and calcium in dairy are all essential nutrients and provide various health benefits. On the other hand, refined sugar is commonly extracted from sugar canes or sugar beets. It is typically added to food and drinks, e.g. cakes, pastries and soft drinks, to enhance flavour. These foods usually provide empty calories with no nutritional benefits and are generally high in added sugar, salt and unhealthy fats. Therefore, there is no need to avoid sugar completely, instead, make sure that most of the sugar in your diet comes from fruit, vegetables and dairy.

### **CLAIM: Superfoods.**

'Superfoods' have become increasingly popular over the past few years. Despite what the media might say, there is no such thing as a 'superfood'. It is a marketing term with no standard scientific definition. A food is promoted as a 'superfood' if it is rich in certain nutrients or linked with beneficial health outcomes. Blueberries, acai, quinoa, kale etc are often listed as 'superfoods', however, there is nothing that makes them more superior than other fruit, vegetables or wholegrains. In a well balanced diet, all essential nutrients can be obtained. The term 'superfood' is a tool for driving sales as opposed to promoting nutritional recommendations.

### **CLAIM: Organic Foods Are Healthier.**

Organic foods are those produced without the use of artificial fertilisers or chemicals. Studies have been shown that organic and conventional foods have very similar nutrient compositions, and that organic foods do not have a nutritional advantage over their conventional counterparts. Interestingly, a recent review has suggested potential health benefits associated with increased organic food intake, such as reduced risks of



# Nutrition Fact Sheet

## Separating Facts from Fiction - Series Three

metabolic syndrome, infertility and birth defects, etc. However, no definitive conclusion can be made on long term health outcomes due to the lack of long term studies. Therefore, the purchase of organic foods is a matter of personal choice, but one should be aware of their higher costs.

### **CLAIM: Gluten-Free Diet Is Healthier.**

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. Some common gluten containing foods include bread, cereal, pasta and many baked goods. A gluten-free diet is often prescribed by health professionals as a treatment plan for those with coeliac disease or are sensitive to gluten. Gluten-free diet is not designed for weight loss and should not be used as a weight loss diet. Studies have shown that following a gluten-free diet can potentially reduce your intake of fibre, vitamins and minerals, leading to nutritional deficiencies. The weight loss experienced by some people following the gluten free diet is actually a result of a highly restrictive diet and the elimination of gluten-containing processed foods, such as cakes, doughnuts and pies. Therefore, for people without coeliac disease or gluten sensitivity, the gluten-free diet is not healthier and may lead to negative health outcomes.

### **CLAIM: Lactose Intolerance Means Avoiding All Dairy.**

Lactose intolerance is the reduced ability to digest sugar (lactose) in milk due to a lack of the lactase enzyme in the body. Individuals with lactose intolerance may experience bloating, diarrhoea and gas, after consuming dairy. However, most people with lactose intolerance can still enjoy certain dairy foods without undesirable symptoms. There are ways to build up tolerance to dairy foods, including: (1) start with smaller serves of dairy and gradually increase serve size, (2) drink milk with meals and avoid empty stomach, (3) choose yoghurt and hard cheese instead of milk, as these are often well tolerated. Therefore, there is no need to cut out dairy from your diet completely. Through careful experimentation, you can find the right amounts and types of dairy that you can tolerate comfortably. If required, see a doctor or dietitian for more management strategies and individualised approaches.