

# Four Nutrition Myths that are Bad for Your Health

by Christine Rosenbloom, PhD, RD/LD



We all want to eat well and choose the healthiest eating plans, but separating nutrition fact from fiction can be tricky. Here are some persistent nutrition myths I often hear from friends, family and even the media, along with the facts to clear the air.

## 1. Raw Foods are Always Healthier than Cooked Foods

While raw foods are full of vitamins, minerals and plant compounds that promote good health, some nutrients are more bioavailable when cooked. Lycopene, the carotenoid that gives tomatoes their red color, is absorbed three to four times better when cooked. Tomato sauce, tomato paste, tomato soup and even tomato ketchup deliver more lycopene to the body than raw tomatoes. Kale is a rich source of beta-carotene and fat-soluble vitamins A and K, and all of these nutrients are more available to the body in cooked kale compared with raw kale. And the lutein in carrots, the compound that promotes healthy eyes and vision, is better absorbed in cooked carrots.

Cooking also makes proteins in meat and fish more easily digested, and let's face it, meat or fish smells and tastes a lot better when cooked than it does in the raw state. Lastly, cooking helps destroy harmful bacteria that may lurk in foods. So, enjoy raw foods as part of a healthy eating plan, but remember that cooked foods have their merits.

## 2. All Processed Foods are Bad

If you think all processed foods are bad, put down your morning cup of coffee, tea or almond milk, as all of these morning favorites are processed foods. When talking about processed foods, most people think of foods that contain excessive added sugars, fats and sodium while contributing few healthful nutrients. Those types of packaged foods are not healthy, but processed foods aren't all bad.

Baby carrots are processed, as are the kid-friendly apple slices sold in the produce section. And while bagged salads are more expensive, who hasn't enjoyed the convenience of bagged produce when time is tight? Recent research from the American Institute for Cancer Research suggests that new methods of processing to enhance the absorption of the good stuff in plant foods could be used to fight some cancers. So, instead of painting all processed foods as "bad," differentiate between the processed foods that supply healthful nutrients versus those that contain too much sugar, fat and sodium.

## 3. Natural Foods are Always Healthier

The word “natural” conjures visions of fresh-picked blueberries or juice from freshly squeezed oranges. Too bad “natural” is a marketing buzzword that is not defined by the Food and Drug Administration. Some manufacturers use the word natural to make you believe a food is more healthful when in fact it is high in calories, fat or sugar.

For example, some candy is sold as natural because it contains agave nectar or honey, but to the body sugar is sugar no matter the source, so that doesn’t make “natural” candy more healthful. Snack foods are also being touted as natural. Potato chips with the peel left on the potato before being fried into a chip are not more healthful than other chips. So, save your money on packaged foods touting to be “natural” and instead snack on truly natural foods like fruits, veggies and nuts.

#### 4. All Sugar Should be Eliminated.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently recommended that we cut our sugar intake from 10% of calories to 5% of calories. That equates to about 6 teaspoons of sugar or 25 grams per day. Sugar that occurs naturally, like in milk or fruit, is packaged with many other nutrients, so focus on reducing added sugars but don’t worry about the few grams of sugar in milk or fresh fruit.

*Christine Rosenbloom, PhD, RD/LD*

IDEA Author/Presenter