

# 7 “UNHEALTHY” FOODS THAT ARE ACTUALLY GREAT FOR YOUR HEALTH

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Our experts shed light on how including these foods in your diet might actually be good for you.

Here are our panel of experts:

Jaclyn Reutens: Clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants

Li Si Yang: Health and fitness coach from US-based Journey To Fitness

Sheena Smith: Naturopath and clinical nutritionist from the Integrated Medicine Institute in Hong Kong

Pooja Vig: Nutritionist and co-founder of The Nutrition Clinic



## 1. Egg Yolks

### Why the bad rep?

"We all know that egg whites are healthy but the truth is that the yolks are probably more nutritious," says Sheena Smith, a naturopath and clinical nutritionist from the Integrated Medicine Institute in Hong Kong. "Yes, the yolks are mainly made up of fat and cholesterol.

And people used to believe that if you consumed cholesterol, it would directly affect your blood-cholesterol levels. But this is not the case. As long as you do not have any egg allergies, you can safely consume one to two eggs a day."

### Why they deserve more credit:

Yolks are packed with fat-soluble nutrients like vitamins A, D, E and K, so eggs are actually a perfect way to start the day. "They are a great source of protein and can help stabilise your blood-sugar levels for the rest of the morning, keeping you fuller for a longer time," says Sheena.



## **2. Red Meat**

### **Why the bad rep?**

Red meats like lamb and beef are high in saturated fat, which have been linked to everything from increased cholesterol levels to heart disease, obesity and cancer.

But Pooja Vig, nutritionist and co-founder of The Nutrition Clinic, says most of these studies have proved inconclusive. In fact, research is currently being done to determine if consuming red meat can reduce anxiety and depression.

### **Why it deserves more credit:**

Compared with white meat like chicken and turkey, red meat contains higher levels of vitamin B12, iron and zinc, says Pooja. "With red meat, buy the highest quality you can afford and, where possible, opt for grass-fed varieties as they contain less saturated fat." Of course, red meat should still be eaten in moderation. And be sure to trim all visible fat before cooking to cut down on your saturated fat intake.



### **3. Butter**

#### **Why the bad rep?**

When you think of butter, ailments like heart disease, high cholesterol and obesity come to mind. There was a time, in the '80s, when everyone switched to margarine as they believed it was far healthier.

But in the last few years, more health experts have urged us to ditch margarine in favour of more natural butter. Butter is made from cream, whereas margarine is made by processing vegetable oils and may contain unhealthy trans fats and chemicals. But as butter contains saturated fat, it should still be taken in moderation.

#### **Why it deserves more credit:**

Pooja says butter is high in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and healthy fats. It contains butyrate, which are fatty acids that help prevent weight gain, keep us full longer and lower our insulin and fasting triglyceride levels.



#### **4. Salt**

##### **Why the bad rep?**

Sheena says the belief that salt causes high blood pressure was based on just one study. Since then, numerous studies that have looked at the effects of a low-salt diet on high blood pressure have all concluded that reducing salt in your diet doesn't have any significant health benefits; it reduces blood pressure by a mere one to five points. "Unless you are one of the small minority of people who suffers from salt-sensitive hypertension, there is no reason for you to avoid salt," Sheena explains.

##### **Why it deserves more credit:**

Salt is essential for your body to function. It is a major component of blood, extracellular fluid and lymphatic fluid. It helps in the transmission of nerve impulses throughout the body, nutrient absorption by your cells, regulating fluid levels and helping muscles to relax.

But the body doesn't produce salt, which is why our daily recommended intake of 5g has to come from the food we eat. "Health problems arise when we consume a lot of processed foods, which tend to be extremely high in salt, and not a good form of salt at that," Sheena says.

"It is better to consume pure sea salt or Himalayan salt, which have added minerals," she advises. Unlike regular salt, sea salt and Himalayan salt are intensely flavoured, so a little goes a long way.



## **5. Coffee**

### **Why the bad rep?**

Caffeine, a naturally occurring stimulant in coffee, has been linked to stroke, heart attack, heart palpitations, heartburn, anxiety, stomach ulcers and even diarrhoea.

### **Why it deserves more credit:**

Jaclyn Reuters, a clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants, says that in recent years, coffee has been clinically proven to have cardiovascular benefits and to reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

The beneficial qualities of coffee can be attributed to the flavonoids and antioxidants in it – to fully reap their benefits, consume no more than two cups a day. And skip the milk, sugar and cream so you don't pile on the kilos.





## **6. White Rice**

### **Why the bad rep?**

We've been told that white rice is fattening. The reality is that eating too much of any food – even brown rice – can cause weight gain, says Jaclyn. "In Asia, rice usually makes up three-quarters of a meal, but that's too much for the average person," she points out.

### **Why it deserves more credit:**

The whole grain is full of energy-giving carbohydrates and B vitamins that help the body release and utilise energy, as well as minerals like magnesium, phosphorus and iron.

"White rice is nutritious and can be part of a balanced diet," Jaclyn says. "Reduce your intake to half or a quarter of your plate, and you'll be able to enjoy it without the guilt."



## **7. Pasta**

### **Why the bad rep?**

Like white rice, pasta also falls under the Do Not Eat list. Unlike white rice, pasta is not a whole food as it is typically made from processed wheat and eggs. Li Si Yang, a health and fitness coach from US-based Journey To Fitness, says that eating the starchy carb in moderation is key to avoiding weight gain.

What you consume it with is also important. "Naturally, if you're going to top your pasta dishes with creamy sauces or cheese, or cook them using a lot of oil, you will put on weight if you eat too much," she adds.

### **Why it deserves more credit:**

Pasta is a good source of energy, iron and B vitamins, says Li Si, and if you make it yourself, you can control what you put in it, making it even healthier. For instance, adding chopped spinach to pasta dough increases its iron content.

The trick to eating pasta more healthily is to serve it with tomato- based sauces or even broth. Add beans and vegetables to make it more nutritious, and hold the cheese

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