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Obvious Unknown Food Facts

"Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please." --Mark Twain

Some nutrition dogmas are repeated so often we generally come to accept them without question. Whether we act on these dogmas might depend more on how easy they make our lives than on how true they are. My favorite examples are the dogmas of peanut butter being a protein and breakfast being the most important meal.

Nuts and whole wheat have the same amount of protein. All nuts have similar macronutrient breakdowns (the relative amount of protein, fat and carbohydrate), so this discussion holds true for all nuts and nut products, including cashews, pistachios, almonds, and almond milk. The most credible current scoring system for the quality of protein sources (based on their digestibility and amino-acid ratio for the human body) rates nuts and whole wheat at just over 50% quality. This means you should cut the protein count almost in half from what you see on a nutrition label to derive how much protein your body actually uses a protein source.

- One 2-oz serving of peanut butter is ~ 200 Cal and contains 7 grams of protein, with its quality score cutting this down to at most 4 grams, or 16 Calories of usable protein per 200 Calorie portion. Whole grain wheat flour, by comparison, has 8 grams total and therefore 4 grams (16 Calories) of useful protein in each 200 Calories. Peanut butter and whole wheat are identical therefore have the same 16% but 8% usable protein. Yet peanut butter has the reputation of being a protein source, whereas bread, pasta, crackers and bagels do not. Perhaps this is because nuts and nut butters have a "meaty" mouth feel stemming from the healthy fats, which are the rest of the Calories, whereas the whole-wheat foods do not, carbs being the rest. Whether you argue for 16% total or 8% usable protein in these sources, there is an obvious numerical conflict in viewing one as a protein and the other not. My personal view is that they are not "protein" foods since they do not meet our protein needs without over-eating them. But at the very least they should be categorized the same whether that is as protein sources or not.
- All living cells contain protein whether from a plant or animal, so it is trivial to point out that all food contains protein. If in eating a protein source, we still have to add another higher quality protein source to our meal to sustain our body, then perhaps we are losing the benefit of calling the protein deficient food a protein. Nuts and whole grains certainly contain protein, just not enough to avoid adding more. If you choose to have a meal low in protein that is fine, but touting it as protein when the nutrition label of the ingredients say otherwise is a simple and innocent act of ignorance. Consider a favorite of our society: the peanut butter sandwich, which contains at least two ingredients of equally low protein, together providing just as low a protein.
- When I discuss the nutrition label of nut butter and whole grains with someone, I often find them still thinking almond milk is protein because it has the word "milk" in the name. Almond milk has 1 gram (4 Calories) of protein per cup, and with only half the protein efficiency of soy, we would need to use a half gallon of almond milk to get enough protein in a single meal. That amount of fluid can cause serious damage to neurons, so much safer to go with over-eating 500 Calories of almonds, peanuts, or any nut or seed butter.
- Believing the repeated dogma on nuts instead of looking at the label makes life easier since it adds a tasty protein option for a meal or snack, but it unknowingly deprives the body of protein. Unless you want to overeat them.

Breakfast is both the most important and the most skipped meal of the day. The word is to "eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a pauper." Half of us turn this around, and then feed the morning pauper either garbage or nothing at all. Lunch often has to go fast, eating whatever is available. And at dinner we gorge.

- We have a higher metabolic rate (including more fat burning) when we eat nothing for breakfast compared to processed carbs (toast, juice, dry cereal). So comparing garbage to nothing, nothing is better. Unfortunately for us, we lose at least 10 Calories of actual lean tissue in our body every hour we delay eating after waking, dropping our metabolic rate faster than natural aging. That is the amount of lean tissue in a single hour that a natural body builder gains from one hour of intensive strength training then a full week of recovery. If we knew our body was eating itself that fast when we woke, we would feel an urgency to eat before doing anything else.
- Most people I know are very busy, particularly during work hours, so lunch becomes whatever is quickly available. And yet few people take vegetables with them from home to add to whatever garbage might be coming along to slow its digestion and add some health value. Look for solutions, not an endless stream of barriers.
- Dinner will be a gorge fest if your brain has cravings from a low quality breakfast and lunch. Take 10 minutes upon waking to eat a solid breakfast, take vegetables with you to add to whatever lunch is coming, and then see how your evening cravings become manageable. You might still over-eat a tasty dinner, but by choice.