

# The Top Ten 'Food Choice Myths' - Busted.

## Myth no 1 'Animals are the only source of B12'

We need vitamin B12 to make nerves and red blood cells. It also helps us obtain energy from our food. It's often said that animals are the only source of B12 in food, and strictly speaking (excluding unfortified food) that's true.

But B12 is actually produced by bacteria that live in the soil and animals get their B12 by eating food (plants) that has these bacteria on it, B12 is then taken up into their flesh (or milk).

We don't have to eat animals to get B12; we can get it from the same place that animals do. No, not from eating grass – vitamin B12 can be (and already is) made in giant vats full of bacteria and then used to fortify foods such as cereals and soya milk and to produce vitamin supplements.

This type of B12 is easier to absorb in the body than B12 from meat. So much so that the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences in the US recommends that *all* adults (whatever their diet) over 50 get their B12 from vitamin supplements or fortified foods.

We can all get all the B12 we need (and a better kind of B12) from a well-balanced plant-based diet. We don't need animals in the loop.

For more info see [B12 and the Vegan Diet](#)

## Myth no 2 'We need cow's milk for calcium'

It's accepted wisdom to so many people that we can only get the calcium we need, for healthy bones, from cow's milk. But that's so very, very wrong.

Not only is milk not the only source of calcium in food, it is by a long way not the richest source of calcium in food and not the most easily used by humans either.

There are over 20 plant based foods that contain more calcium than milk on a pound for pound basis. And the calcium in these plants is actually more easily absorbed by our bodies (more bio available) than that in milk and milk-derived products. More and better calcium actually comes from plants.

Better sources than milk include dark green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, kale, cabbage and watercress. Dried fruits, nuts, seeds, pulses (peas, beans and lentils) are also excellent sources of calcium. These foods offer many other health benefits (see subsequent busted myths) as well as providing a natural and safe source of calcium.

So we don't need cows milk for our calcium, but consider this also. Cow's milk is an unnatural food for humans to consume – over 70 per cent of the world's population are lactose intolerant and can't digest it. That should be no real surprise milk is, after all, baby food for cows. Humans are the only mammals in the world that consume baby milk from another species, and seek to do so in adulthood. Are we just weird?

Diets rich in dairy products are associated with an increased risk of many diseases including osteoporosis (a bone disease..!), cancer, heart disease, obesity and diabetes.

Ever wonder where cows get their calcium?....

Let's cut out the middleman, milk really is not a smart way to get our calcium. And most of the world's people already don't get their calcium that way.

For more info see [Boning up on Calcium!](#)

### **Myth no 3 'Without meat we can't get enough iron'**

Iron-deficiency is actually the most common nutritional problem in the world. Symptoms include fatigue, pale skin, a weakened immune system and a reduced ability to concentrate. Vulnerable groups include: infants over six months, toddlers, adolescents, pregnant and menstruating women and older people.

But, vegetarians and vegans are no more likely to suffer from iron-deficiency than meat-eaters. However, despite all the evidence to the contrary, the myth that veggies go short on iron pervades.

Too much iron, on the other hand, can also lead to problems. The type of iron found in meat (haem iron) can build up in the body and cause constipation, nausea, vomiting and stomach pain. Excessively high levels can lead to liver damage, heart failure and diabetes.

Non-haem iron, from plant foods, does not accumulate in the body in this way; you only absorb as much or as little as you need. Good sources of (good) iron include pulses (peas, beans and lentils), soya milk, tofu, green leafy vegetables (broccoli and watercress), fortified breakfast cereals, wholegrains (wholemeal bread, wholemeal pasta), dried fruits, black treacle and dark chocolate.

Some substances in food can interfere with iron absorption (phytates in unrefined grains, tannins in tea, casein and **calcium in cow's milk**). While others can increase iron absorption; the amount of vitamin C in 200ml of orange juice can increase iron absorption three- to four-fold.

The evidence clearly shows that a well-balanced plant-based diet provides as much, or more iron – and a better form of iron, than one containing meat.

For more info see [Ironing out the Facts](#)

#### **Myth no 4 ‘A vegan diet lacks protein’**

We need protein for normal growth and repair of tissues and for protection against infection. Protein is made up of small ‘building blocks’ called amino acids. We get these from food and our bodies use them to build enzymes, muscle and connective tissue (amongst other things).

A well-balanced plant-based diet will provide all the amino acids you need. Especially good sources include soya products (soya beans, tofu, soya milk and veggie mince) and quinoa which quickly cooks and is often used like rice. Pulses (peas, beans and lentils), nuts and seeds and wholegrain foods (wholemeal pasta, brown rice and wholemeal bread) all provide an excellent source.

Here’s that thought again. Where do herbivores get their protein from? When they’re not being fed bits of other herbivores (or fish) of course – in the pursuit of profit over nature. Plants really do have it all.

Unlike protein from plants, protein from meat and other animal foods has been linked to certain cancers, heart disease and many other diseases. Meat also contains little calcium and no fibre or carbohydrate. It may contain dangerous microbes such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli* and is often the cause of food poisoning.

A well-balanced plant-based diet supplies all the protein you need, whether you are a growing child or a mature adult – with none of the risks associated with the middle man (meat).

For more info see [Nutrition in a Nutshell](#).

#### **Myth no 5 ‘Soya foods are bad for you’**

Soya beans are a healthy nutritious food. They are a great source of protein containing all eight essential amino acids (the building blocks of protein). They contain ‘good’ polyunsaturated fats (including omega-3s), disease-busting antioxidants, B vitamins, iron and are cholesterol-free. Soya protein lowers cholesterol and protects heart health. Soya foods may also reduce menopausal hot flushes, osteoporosis, prostate cancer and breast cancer. Some studies suggest soya may even help boost brain power.

However, there is a vigorous ‘anti-soya crusade’ circulating a range of scare stories about soya phytoestrogens (plant hormones). Firstly, phytoestrogens are much weaker than animal hormones (oestrogen) found in meat and milk. Secondly, there is no evidence that soya foods harm human health. There is an abundance of evidence on the other hand that meat and dairy have harmful effects on our health. And it’s not like Soya hasn’t been around for thousands of years and used by millions of people. If it was harmful, evidence would exist by now – but it doesn’t.

Traditional soya foods (such as tofu, miso, tempeh and soya milk) made using fermentation or precipitation methods, contain more fibre, vitamins and minerals than the

soya protein isolates used in mock meats. However, soya burgers and bangers still remain a healthier option than their meaty equivalents, which contain saturated animal fat, animal protein and cholesterol.

And finally, one of the daftest stories used against soya... what about the environmental impact soya farming is having on the Amazonian rain forest?

Over 80 per cent of the world's soya production is fed to livestock so that people can eat meat and dairy foods. So if people ate more soya and less meat, the Amazon would be a better, bigger place.

For more info see the [Safety of Soya](#).

### **Myth no 6 'Oily fish boosts brain power'**

We've had it drummed into us for years that fish oils help boost brain power and protect heart health, but is it true? Much of the fish oil frenzy that has gripped the nation is due to some very clever marketing and some not so clever pseudo science.

There is actually no evidence that fish oils are essential for cognitive ability in children or adults. If this were true, vegetarians would be failing at school – they are not. In fact, in 2006, a group of veggies won the BBC's Test the nation IQ battle!

The so-called 'scientific evidence' for fish oils is constantly being pushed; the reality presents a very different picture with some studies showing that fish oils can actually have a harmful effect (increasing the risk of heart attacks in patients with heart disease). This is because of the pollutants found in fish such as polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxins and mercury.

Guess where fish actually get their omega-3 from? From eating plants (algae)..!

Some of them get it from eating other fish (that got their omega-3 from plants). But it's still the same source at the end of the day – plants.

Fish are middlemen too. And we don't need them.

Plant-based omega-3 fats (from flaxseed, rapeseed, hempseed oil and walnuts) are safer, healthier and better for the environment. Better for the seas for sure.

For more info see [Fish-free for Life](#)

### **Myth no 7 'Westerners are the healthiest people in the world'**

We are not the healthy people we might think we are... We may be living longer but not to a healthy old age! Although less people die of heart disease now, more people than ever are living with it; breast cancer cases have increased 80 per cent since 1970; diabetes has reached epidemic proportions and one in four children are overweight or obese...

The Western diet, full of saturated fat, cholesterol, animal protein, hormones and growth factors, is killing us. It is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, breast cancer (called 'rich woman's disease in China) and prostate cancer.

A vegetarian or vegan diet rich in fruit and vegetables, whole grains and polyunsaturated fats offers significant health benefits. This healthy diet can help you avoid these 'Western diseases'.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) claims that up to 80 per cent of cases of heart disease, 90 per cent of type 2 diabetes cases and one-third of cancers can be avoided by changing to a healthier diet, increasing physical activity and stopping smoking.

For more info see [Veggie Diets, Protecting your Health](#).

### **Myth no 8 'Red-blooded men need meat'**

A backhanded way of suggesting that men need meat in order to perform sexually. Actually the reverse is true.

The main cause of impotence in men is blocked arteries, caused by fatty foods (meat and dairy products). The foods that clog up the arteries leading to and from the heart also block the blood flow to other vital organs! These foods increase the risk of diabetes and obesity; also linked to impotence.

On the other hand, a diet rich in fruit and vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts and seeds protects against blocked arteries, heart disease, stroke and many other conditions.

Impotence affects one in 10 UK men and while surgery is an option, changing the menu is a much easier way of ensuring you can rise to the occasion.

### **Myth no 9 'Chicken is the low-fat option'**

In the 1970s chicken was heralded as the 'healthy' option, lower in fat than red meat. It was a successful campaign; we (well not all of us) now eat three times more chicken.

But selective breeding and intensive farming methods mean that farmers can get the poor birds to our tables in a fraction of the time it used to take. This focus on rapid growth has changed the nature of chicken meat. It now contains as much fat as a Big Mac! (OMG, that's not exactly lean meat is it). More than twice as much than it did in 1940.

Organic chickens are not much better. They may have more space than factory-farmed chickens (which is nice) but they're still fed the same high-energy feed and are bred for rapid weight gain. White meat is not a healthy option.

Think Big Mac next time you think Chicken.

For more info see [White Meat Myths](#)

### **Myth no 10 ‘We are designed to eat meat’**

We can eat meat, but are we designed to? The way our bodies are made suggests that we have evolved eating fruits, nuts, grains and vegetables.

Carnivorous animals (lions, dogs, wolves) are built for short bursts of extreme energy, with strong jaws, sharp teeth and claws. Their jaws can only move open and shut and are designed for tearing and crushing. They don't hang around chewing food; they tear off chunks of meat and 'wolf' it down whole! Their stomachs are more acidic for bone and flesh digestion and their short intestines allow them to quickly expel the putrefying bacteria from rotting flesh. These guys are designed to eat meat.

Herbivores (rabbits, elephants, horses and sheep) eat grass and other plants. The breakdown of these foods starts in the mouth with digestive enzymes; carnivores don't do this. Herbivores can chew from side-to-side and have much longer digestive systems to allow sufficient time and space for absorption of nutrients. These guys are designed to eat plants.

Humans are Omnivores, we can eat plants and animals, but our digestive systems more closely fit the Herbivore description than the Carnivore, by a long way.

We can eat meat, but we're not designed for it. We can swim, but we're not designed for it, not in the way fish are.

Perhaps it's academic anyway. This whole 'are we or aren't we designed this way'.

The big thing about humans is we have intellect, we have free will – we can reason and choose.

And just because we can do something doesn't make it a good or right thing to do.

People that want to eat meat should just say so - that they want to, and drop the 'pseudo evolutionary' excuses about being designed to do so.

And the 'pseudo nutritional' excuses about needing to... :)

Through these ten most common myths, busted here, it's clear that we can all get all the nutrients we need, and often in a form our bodies can better use, from a plant based diet – and at the same time avoid the negative health impacts of eating meat, fish and dairy products. **There are no nutritional downsides to stopping the eating of meat, fish and dairy products – only nutritional upsides.**

These 'Busted Myths' are brought to you with the collaboration of Dr Justine Butler (Senior Health Campaigner at the [Vegetarian and Vegan Foundation](#) and [Viva](#)) and Dale Vince (founder of [Ecotricity](#) and owner of the [Zerocarbonista](#) blog).