

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Fats, Fruits and Vegetables, and Fiction”

Fiction is defined as “stories about people or events that are not real.” For years we have heard the mantra of eating at least five fruit and vegetable servings a day for optimal health and also to avoid fats. New studies indicate that these claims may be either over exaggerations or mostly fictitious. First, let’s consider fruits and vegetables. Some so called experts have even started recommending 7- to 10-A-Day servings of fruits and veggies but currently, WHO guidelines suggest five servings of fruits, vegetables or legumes each day. New data from the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study has found that the benefits of eating fruits and vegetable aren't limitless. In many parts of the world, five servings a day is too expensive. The PURE study showed the lowest risk of death was among people who ate three to four servings with little additional benefit beyond that range. Experts said that they do not want to tell people who are eating more than the recommendation to eat less and that people who are meeting or exceeding the daily goal of fruits, vegetables and legumes shouldn't take the findings as a license to eat less of those foods. Controversially, Professor Walter Willet of Harvard University said research shows, "that any association of intake and fruits and vegetables with risk of cancer is weak at best." People who ate more fruit and vegetables lived healthier lives in many other respects too, which was the basis for any lowered rates of chronic diseases. As regards the advice to avoid fats and to eat a low-fat diet for overall health is also changing quickly. The World Health Organization currently advises people to get no more than 30% of energy from fats and to avoid saturated fats found in things like animal products. Those recommendations are based on data from North America and Europe. The PURE researchers had dietary information from 135,335 people who were followed for roughly 7 years. People who ate the most carbohydrates were 28% more likely to die from any cause during the study than those who ate the least. When people were divided into quintiles based on how their fat consumption, those who consumed the most fat – of any kind – were about 23% less likely to die during the study than those who ate the least. The findings were consistent no matter what type of fat was consumed, including animal fats. Thus, guidelines could relax restrictions on fat while focusing on carbohydrate intake.

In the America that I love, continue to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables, focus more on reducing carbohydrates and less on a fat free diet. Rest assured, more will be coming to replace fiction with facts.

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