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The Health Benefits of 'Unhealthy' Foods

BY SARAH LINNEY

WITH MYRIAD MIXED MESSAGES ABOUT WHAT IS REALLY HEALTHY FOR YOU, EXPERTS ARE URGING AUSTRALIANS TO RETHINK AND RE-EXAMINE FOODS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN MISREPRESENTED.

From red meat to avocados to dairy products, many foods have been conventionally linked to body fat. *The CEO Magazine* recently spoke to two experts who lifted the lid on the unexpected health benefits of some traditionally 'unhealthy' foods.

Certified personal trainer and owner of MET Fitness Kimberley Watson says many Australians don't understand the hidden benefits of fatty foods. "It's no coincidence that our modern diet is deficient in micronutrients, which are the vitamins and minerals commonly found in high-fat foods. We all know that unhealthy foods include those high in fat and sugar, and they are generally highly processed to the point where there is very little nutritional value left.

"Natural foods that have also been given a bad rap over the years contain health benefits and do the body good. By avoiding all dietary fats, we have done ourselves a disservice by cutting out entire vitamin and mineral groups that are important for our health.

"Essential fatty acids cannot be produced by the body and, as the name suggests, are essential for great hair, nails, and the proper functioning of many cellular processes. These natural foods also deliver many health benefits, and should be included as a regular part of a healthy diet."

Sally Symonds, director of the online weight-loss system *Love Your Weight Loss*—and author of *50 Steps to Lose 50kg...And Keep It Off* and *50+ Recipes to Lose 50+kg...And Keep It Off*—says misinformation has kept a lot of Australians in the dark.

"Fat is traditionally thought of as unhealthy, but monounsaturated fats have now been proven to help weight loss, reduce cholesterol, and decrease the risk of breast cancer, heart attacks, and stroke, as well as aid in the management of rheumatoid arthritis. Good sources of monounsaturated fats include avocados, olive oil, almonds, and oily fish such as salmon.

"The latest government recommendations suggest that women need to consume more red meat than they are currently eating. Red meat is one of the best sources of iron, which helps prevent tiredness and fatigue. Many studies also now support the notion that full-fat dairy is more effective for weight loss than low-fat."

One food that is often unjustly tarred with the 'unhealthy' brush is eggs. "Once much maligned as the bearer of bad weight-watching news, new research reveals that eggs aren't as bad as they were once cracked up to be," Sally says. "Eggs are often referred to as 'the perfect protein' as they are one of

the few foods that contain all 22 amino acids. Amino acids are the building blocks of our bodies, responsible for muscles, tendons, organs, glands, nails, and hair.

"Eggs are also especially great for our eyes," Sally says. "The 'God's Pharmacy' food theory suggests that God left us clues as to how to heal ourselves by making certain fruits and vegetables resemble the parts of the body whose function they assist. An egg, of course, resembles an eye. They are also one of the few foods to contain naturally occurring vitamin D. In terms of disease prevention, one study showed that women who consumed at least six eggs per week lowered their risk of breast cancer by 44 per cent."

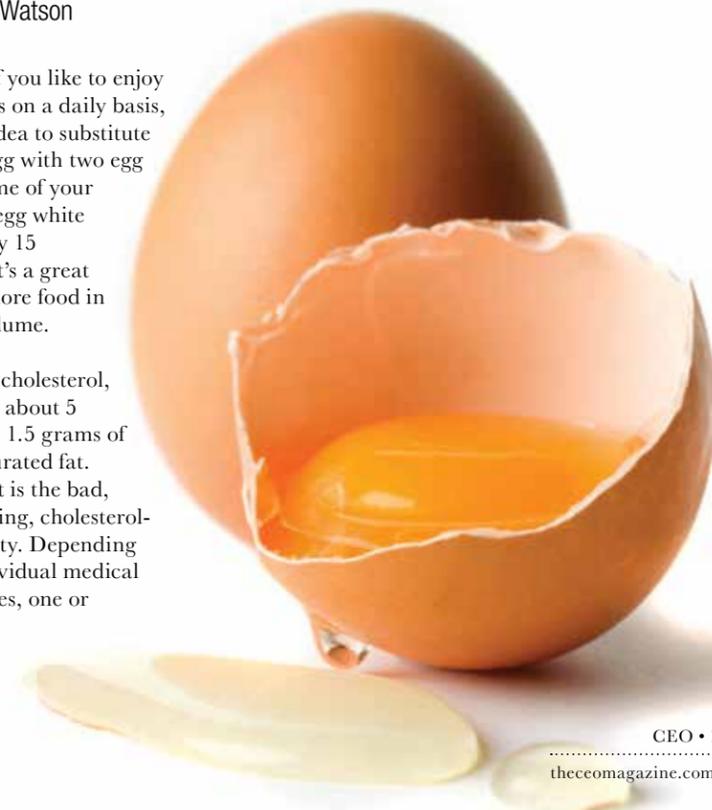
In addition to providing amino acids, eggs also aid weight loss. "A Louisiana State University study found that obese people who ate a two-egg breakfast five days per week lost 65 per cent more weight than women who ate a carbohydrate equivalent," Sally notes. "As eggs contain both protein and fat, they increase your sense of fullness. In many ways, they are a great healthy-living food.

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- Kimberley Watson

"However, if you like to enjoy multiple eggs on a daily basis, it is a good idea to substitute one whole egg with two egg whites in some of your recipes. An egg white contains only 15 calories, so it's a great way to eat more food in regard to volume.

"In terms of cholesterol, eggs contain about 5 grams of fat, 1.5 grams of which is saturated fat. Saturated fat is the bad, artery-clogging, cholesterol-raising variety. Depending on your individual medical circumstances, one or two eggs per day should be fine."





Kimberley agrees. “We’ve been warned that eating too many eggs can raise blood cholesterol levels and lead to an increased risk of heart disease, but recent research does not show this.

“The nutritional benefits include a third of your daily requirement of selenium, vitamins B12, B5, B2, A, D, and E, and 20 per cent of your daily requirement of protein, folate, iron, phosphorus, and zinc, as well as omega-3.”

Avocado is another food that has been traditionally labelled as fattening. “These delicious fruits were avoided for many years due to their 23-per-cent fat content, but they contain monounsaturated fat, which is very different from animal fats,” Kimberley points out. Dietary fat is essential for many cellular processes within the body, and is balanced by the presence of dietary fibre and other nutrients.

“Without consuming dietary fats, our bodies are unable to absorb the fat-soluble vitamins E, D, A, and K. Avocados contain over a dozen minerals, including iron, magnesium, potassium, and selenium, which are essential for optimal health.”

Nuts can also act as a healthy addition to the daily diet. “Nuts create a healthy blood-lipid profile by reducing LDL cholesterol [dangerous] and raising HDL cholesterol [healthy], and are a rich source of omega-3 essential fatty acids,” Kimberley says.

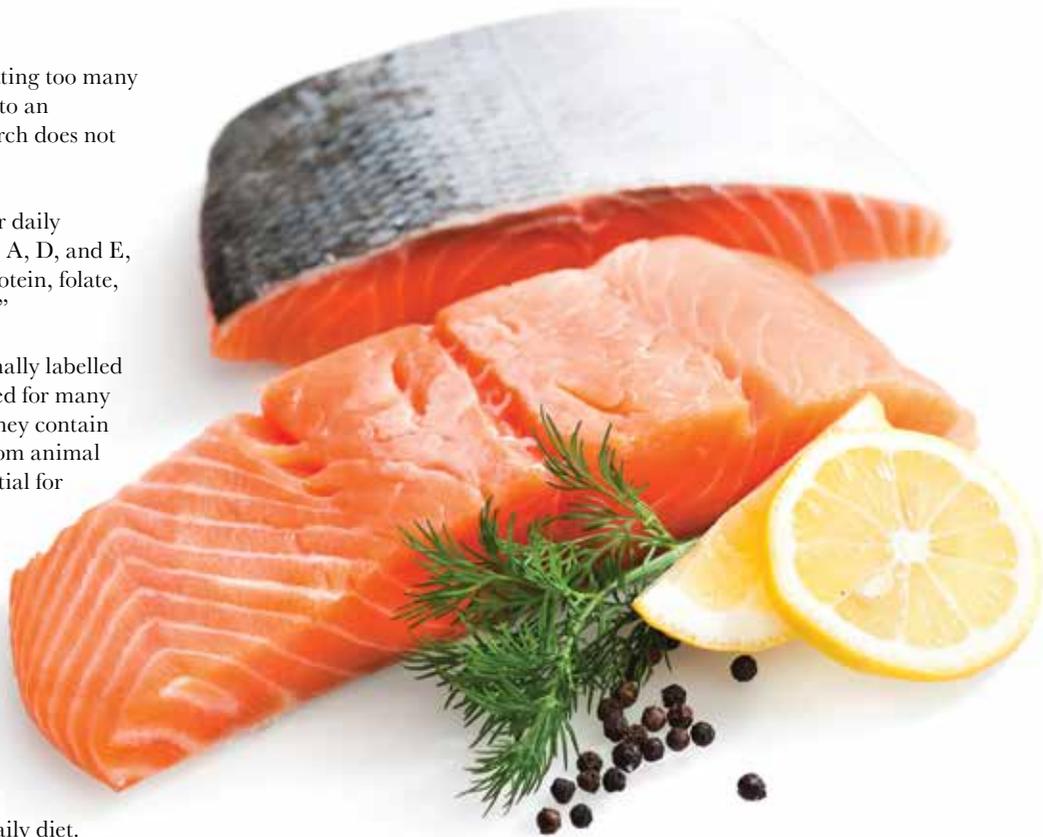
“Compounds found in raw almonds, like carotene and lutein, have been found to offer protection against cancers, heart disease, and degenerative nerve disease. They are also an incredible source of essential minerals such as manganese, potassium, calcium, zinc, and selenium. A handful of almonds are a great snack you can take anywhere.”

Kimberley argues that including all these fatty foods in your diet will add a host of nutritional and health benefits that processed foods will not give you. “The bottom line is this: eat real food. These days, we are far more familiar with the concept of ‘everyday food’ and ‘occasional food,’” she says.

“It’s important to notice how nutritionally deficient foods affect our mood and energy levels and the difference when we make healthy choices. Rather than depriving ourselves of food we enjoy, the goal of enjoying a balanced diet is moderation and knowing that every day is not an ‘occasion’.”

Sally is a great advocate of the ‘keep it simple, stupid’ approach to weight loss and healthy eating. “Eat until you are full, but not overfull,” she explains. “It’s okay to feel peckish, but never okay to feel starving. You do need to eat fat, or your body won’t have access to any of the fat-soluble vitamins, but aim for monounsaturated fat whenever possible. Before you eat, always ask yourself, ‘Is it worth it?’ Sometimes it is, but often it’s not.”

While some fatty foods may have hidden nutritional benefits, the perceived ‘healthiness’ of certain foods is often misleading. “Beware of the ‘halo’ effect,” states Sally. “This is where people assume that something labelled ‘healthy’ in



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some way is a lot better than it actually is. The food may only be a slightly healthier version of what is an unhealthy food to begin with. The halo effect often comes into play with foods labelled with ‘healthy food’ badges or at fast-food restaurants.

“Numerous studies show that customers ordering at fast-food restaurants with ‘healthier’ menu options actually ordered more food and consumed more calories than at regular fast-food restaurants without healthy alternatives.”

While some foods are inherently healthier than others, hidden nutritional benefits can be found in unlikely foods. With a conflicting load of information flooding the market, Australians have to choose their own balanced approach to healthy eating. ●

For more information on MET Fitness and its nutritional guidance for healthy weight loss, visit metfitness.com.

For more information on Sally Symonds, her online weight-loss system, and her range of books, visit sallysymonds.com.au.