

We're bombarded with 'health-giving' foods from coconut water to probiotics, but are they...

FAD OR FACT?

3 ways to treat... NOSEBLEEDS

PREVENT: The nose contains delicate blood vessels that can be easily damaged.

You can prevent the problem by blowing your nose as little and as gently as possible – and avoiding picking it!

Changes in humidity can cause the inside of the nose to become dry and cracked, so use a humidifier in the home, or a little petroleum jelly on the inside of the nostrils helps keep the nose moist.

TREAT: To stop a nosebleed: sit down and firmly pinch the soft part of your nose, just above your nostrils for ten to 15 minutes. Then lean forward and breathe through your mouth while holding an ice pack on the bridge of your nose.

Once the bleed has stopped, stay upright to reduce the pressure in the blood vessels of your nose and discourage further bleeding.

Nosebleeds aren't usually serious, but heavy or frequent episodes should be checked out by your GP as they could be a sign of problems such as high blood pressure.

Persistent nosebleeds can also lead to anaemia.

You may be referred to an ENT specialist for tests if your doctor suspects something more serious.

DON'T BOTHER: Take care with your over-the-counter medication. While low doses of aspirin are routinely prescribed by doctors to prevent heart attacks and stroke, for healthy people the risk of side effects – including nosebleeds – caused by frequent use can outweigh the benefits.

Excessive use of nasal decongestants for colds or allergies can also cause nosebleeds, so use them only as directed.

BLOG ME BETTER...

BLOG: talontedlex.co.uk

THE BLOGGER: Make-up artist and rosacea sufferer Lex McVeighy, below.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT? Lex puts beauty and grooming products to the acid test of her ultra-sensitive, flushed and sometimes painful skin. From reviewing salon facials ('For years I couldn't trust anyone else around my face,' she writes) and foundations, to blogging advice about her diagnosis, lifestyle changes she made to manage her flare-ups and the skincare that helps her to keep 'everything under control', her page is a must-read for any woman suffering flushed, red skin.



By Jackie Lynch

NUTRITIONAL THERAPIST

FANS of those little yogurty probiotic shots were dealt a blow this month: they are a waste of money, claimed Danish researchers, who said they did nothing tangible to improve digestive wellbeing.

The study has highlighted the sometimes confusing world of so-called 'naturally healthy' and 'functional foods' – which make up five per cent of all food bought in the UK.

From coconut water and trendy, dairy-free milks to cholesterol-lowering spreads and smart water, we are bombarded with claims that must-eat products will give us glowing skin or a trimmer waist, or keep our hearts healthy.

But just how good for us are they really?

For my new book *The Right Bite*, a guide to eating smart on the go, and on my website, well-well-well.co.uk, I analysed menus from countless coffee shops and restaurants, and scoured supermarkets to find out which of these products' claims are rooted in fact – and which are nothing but a fad.

So should you steer clear of frozen yogurts and pass on the popcorn, and does gluten-free necessarily mean healthy?

PROBIOTICS

THE HEALTH CLAIM:

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts added to yogurts or taken as a supplement to stimulate growth of beneficial bacteria in the gut.



THE BIG NAMES: Actimel says its bottle containing ten million bacteria and Vitamins B6 and D is a 'great way to start the day', while rival brand Yakult 'cares about keeping your gut healthy'.

THE TRUTH: I wouldn't bother with these shots or yogurts – at least not for their supposed probiotic benefits. It is true that we have bacteria in the gut that is vital for digestive and immune function. But as studies, including the recent Danish one, have suggested, probiotic-fortified foods probably don't affect the balance of gut bacteria in healthy people. The dose is probably too small to have much of an effect. I do recommend probiotic supplements, though, as they give a bigger dose that is scientifically proven to help recovery from *C. diff* infection in the elderly, and may well be a remedy for other digestive upsets.

VERDICT: FAD

POPCORN

THE HEALTH CLAIM:

Popcorn has been touted for years as a low-fat, high-fibre snack. It's rumoured that Madonna got back into shape four weeks after the birth of her daughter Lourdes by snacking on the stuff.



THE BIG NAMES: Metcalfe's Skinny Popcorn (70g, £1.49) says its Cinema Sweet flavour has 'only 93 calories per serving, say hello to guilt free munching!' Propercorn (90g, £1.59) claims to be 'a brilliant source of fibre'.

THE TRUTH: If you're going for a snack, this is a good option. Plain popcorn is a wholegrain food with

more fibre per serving than a skin-on baked potato (3.5g compared to 3g). Studies have proved that you will also feel fuller for longer after eating a packet, compared to crisps. Just watch out for shop-bought versions that are slathered with oil, sugar and salt. And limit your portions! A large cinema bucket of sweet or salted popcorn can deliver more than 900 calories.

VERDICT: FACT

COCONUT WATER

HEALTH CLAIM:

Low in calories (about 40 per 200ml carton) and, due to naturally occurring potassium and magnesium, more hydrating than plain water.



THE BIG NAMES: Vita Coco (500ml, £1.99), promoted by Bajan pop star Rihanna, has dubbed its 'refreshing and nutrient-packed' coconut water 'Mother Nature's drink of choice', while Chi (1ltr, £3.49) promises its drinks are 'high in potassium and packed with electrolytes [sugars and salts] which keep your body rehydrated, vibrant and healthy'.

THE TRUTH: This is touted as a natural sports recovery drink containing electrolytes. But you will only really benefit from one of these after training for more than an hour at medium to high intensity – and losing a lot of salt in sweat. For the average person, quaffing coconut water throughout the day won't deliver any benefits, and a small 330ml carton contains more than four teaspoons of sugar – over half of your recommended daily limit – which won't do your waistline any favours.

VERDICT: FAD

SMART WATER

HEALTH CLAIM:

Bottled water that contains natural or added ingredients that make them more hydrating than plain water, or provide vitamins, minerals and other nutritional benefits with zero calories.



THE BIG NAMES: Coca Cola's Glaceau Smartwater (600ml, 50p), drunk by Friends star Jennifer Aniston, is 'vapour distilled' so it is 'pure and crisp like from a cloud' with 'added electrolytes', while their vitamin-enriched Vitaminwater has flavours named 'focus', 'endurance', 'refresh', 'defence' and 'essential'.

THE TRUTH: Smartwater is just distilled tap water with added salts – or electrolytes. But the amounts here are too low to make it work as a sports recovery drink. What's the point? I would steer clear of Vitaminwater, too. It contains almost four teaspoons (15g) of sugar per 500ml bottle, which is half the recommended daily limit.

VERDICT: FAD

BRAN MUFFIN

THE HEALTH CLAIM:

A bran muffin instead of a butter croissant seems like a virtuous choice when grabbing breakfast on the go.



THE BIG NAMES: Sandwich chain Pret A Manger boasts that its High Fibre Muffin (130g, £1.50) is 'delicious and nutritious... with more fibre than a bowl of All Bran'.

THE TRUTH: I'm impressed by the Pret muffin: it has 11g of fibre compared to 2g found in the

average shop-bought chocolate or blueberry version, and 10g of protein (there's 26g in the average chicken breast). It's a combination that will balance blood sugar and keep hunger at bay. However, at 442 calories and nearly six of your daily seven teaspoons of sugar, it should be an occasional treat.

VERDICT: FACT

FROZEN YOGURT

THE HEALTH CLAIM:

A familiar sight in supermarket frozen food sections and billed as a 'guilt-free' low-fat alternative to ice cream. One 100ml serving of Waitrose frozen natural yogurt dessert has 90 calories and 1.1g saturated fat.



THE BIG NAMES: Yoo Moo (500ml, £2.50) claim to make 'the best guilt-free frozen yoghurt in the land', while Snog (450ml, £2) says 'make your Snog as healthy or as indulgent as you fancy'.

THE TRUTH: This is a classic diet misconception: frozen yogurt is lower in fat than standard ice cream, but contains roughly the same amount of sugar. And we now know it's the sugar that's the most damaging thing to our bodies. In fact, the healthiest thing about a tub of Haagen-Dazs (also loaded with sugar) is the full-fat cream used.

VERDICT: FAD

DRIED FRUIT

HEALTH CLAIM:

Seen as a 'healthy' snack – especially for children – with added benefits of fibre, antioxidants and vitamins and minerals.



THE BIG NAMES: Bear Yoyo (five 20g packs, £2.29) says its