



Health myths: separating fact from fiction

Most common adages have a bit of truth. When you were a child, your mother may have told you not to go outside with wet hair because you would catch a cold.

That adage can be traced back to the late 1800s. French chemist Louis Pasteur was looking for an anthrax cure, so he exposed chickens to anthrax, then put them in cold water. The chickens got sick and died. He then exposed other chickens and wrapped them in warm blankets; they lived. The truth is anthrax is contagious, but the link between cold and colds lived on.

Below are seven common health adages, and only one is true.

1. **Feed a cold, starve a fever.** Sickness kills your appetite, but the best way to get over a cold and/or fever is to drink lots of clear liquids, rest and eat good calories to recover.
2. **Vitamin C prevents colds.** Vitamin C has other health benefits, but won't help you avoid colds or minimize the impact of a cold.
3. **Reading in dim light or lots of screen time damages your eyes.** Neither hurts your eyes, but both make your eye muscles work harder, which can cause headaches.
4. **Cracking your knuckles causes arthritis.** The pop you hear is pressure on the fluid between your bones, which releases a gas. It won't cause arthritis, but if you have joint pain already, cracking them can be painful.
5. **Fresh vs. frozen or canned.** Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are as nutritious as fresh. In fact, since lycopene is more easily absorbed in the body after it has been processed, canned tomatoes, corn and carrots are sometimes better nutrition choices.
6. **Calories eaten at night are more fattening.** Calories are calories, so if you consume enough calories to fuel your activity level, you will maintain your weight. Looking to lose weight? Decrease your calories. Eating at night can interfere with good sleep, so consume most of your foods and drinks by a few hours before bedtime to rest better.
7. **ringing ears means hearing loss.** Unfortunately, this is true. Most people with tinnitus (ringing in the ears) have some hearing loss since cells in the inner ear amplify low-level sound, so when these die, it causes hearing loss.

In general, good health information often involves getting exercise, sleep, fruits, veggies, water and regular doctor checkups while avoiding tobacco and managing stress. As always, ask a myth-buster (health care provider) if you have questions.

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