



# BOTTOM LINE HEALTH ADVICE

Experts help you sort through confusing messages so you can stay well for life.

BY BARBARA BRODY



The constant flow of breaking health news can make your head spin, especially when the information is contradictory. Should you shun saturated fats or embrace them? Is wine dangerous or the ticket to a long life? Do you need to hit the gym for an hour or mere minutes? To cut through the clutter, *Woman's Day* asked experts to weigh in.

## YOU'VE HEARD:

Red wine is good for your heart.

## YOU'VE ALSO HEARD:

Alcohol causes cancer.

## YOU'VE HEARD:

The longer your sweat session, the better.

## YOU'VE ALSO HEARD:

Staying fit only takes minutes.

Super-short bouts of high-intensity interval training (alternating vigorous activity with recovery) are all the rage, but *can* you get in shape in minutes?

One trial, published in the journal *PLOS One*, found that 4-minute stints of activity are enough to protect your health. Other studies have declared 7 minutes to be the magic number. But you know what they say about things that sound too good to be true...

In order to reap major benefits from a speedy workout, you need to be in tip-top shape to begin with, says Wayne Westcott, PhD, instructor of exercise science at Quincy College in Quincy, MA. That said, you don't necessarily have to sweat it out for an hour every day. Twenty minutes of cardio activities like running, hiking, biking or swimming may be plenty if you manage to get your heart rate up.

**BOTTOM LINE** » If you do something active three to four times a week, 15 to 30 minutes is a perfectly reasonable amount for general well-being. But if you're trying to lose weight or train for an endurance athletic event, you may need to go longer.

The good news: All alcohol—including wine, beer and liquor—offers some heart-protective benefits, says Donald Hensrud, MD, a preventive medicine expert at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. For example, it raises HDL ("good") cholesterol and thins the blood, which minimizes the risk of clots.

And red wine has a slight advantage thanks to antioxidants, like resveratrol. But keep in mind, alcohol isn't risk-free. Drinking large amounts is detrimental, as it can lead to cancer and liver disease.

**BOTTOM LINE** » Aim for moderation: no more than one drink per day for women and two for men—and ideally not every single day, especially if you're at a high risk for cancer.



**YOU'VE HEARD:**  
Saturated fat will clog your arteries.

**YOU'VE ALSO HEARD:**  
Butter isn't so bad after all.

Last year, a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* seemed to turn the common wisdom that saturated fat is dangerous on its head. According to the research, people who ate more of certain types of saturated fat (found in full-fat dairy and animal products) weren't any more likely to develop heart disease than those who consumed less. But here's what you may not know: There's still plenty of expert-backed evidence that saturated fat can clog your bloodstream with cholesterol. In fact, the American Heart Association recommends limiting your intake to just 5% to 6% of your total daily calories.

Meanwhile, other types of fat have proven benefits, says Marisa Moore, RDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats—like those found in nuts, avocados and fatty fish—promote heart health."

**BOTTOM LINE** » A little pat of butter or a small steak is OK on occasion, but you should mostly stick with healthy fats.

**YOU'VE HEARD:**  
A great way to cut down on calories is to use artificial sweeteners.

**YOU'VE ALSO HEARD:**  
Fake sugar might be even worse than the real stuff.

Some studies have shown that people lose more weight by incorporating artificial sweeteners into their diet, but others have found that artificial sweetener users—especially diet soda drinkers—tend to be heavier. Now, a study published in the journal *Nature* finds that faux sugar might cause glucose intolerance (a condition associated with diabetes) by altering organisms in your gut.

Scott Isaacs, MD, an Atlanta-based endocrinologist and faculty member at Emory University School of Medicine, believes that sweeteners are confusing your body. "The brain thinks it's getting something sweet, which leads to cravings since you're not actually obtaining calories," he says.

**BOTTOM LINE** » If you're happy with the number on the scale, one diet soda per day (or less) is probably fine. But if you're trying to lose weight and getting stuck, consider giving artificial sweeteners the boot.

## The truth about calcium

Recent research reveals that taking calcium supplements may increase your heart attack risk by as much as 30%. Learn how to bolster your bones *without* harming your ticker.

» **Think twice about pills.** If taken in pill form, you can get too much calcium at once. If that happens, some of it may end up in your blood vessels, causing them to harden.

» **Focus on food.** Milk, yogurt and cheese are great picks, but you can get some calcium from leafy greens and fortified foods (like OJ and certain cereals), too. If your diet is lacking, talk to your doctor before popping a calcium pill.

» **If you do take a supplement, couple it with vitamin D.** This mineral acts like a traffic cop, directing the calcium into the bones where it belongs.

SOURCE: Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, internist and creator of the free Cures A-Z app



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