

## Health myths

### *Top 10 health myths exposed*

Bunch of bananas? The fruit is actually low in fat

Do carrots really help your eyesight? Should you actually eat for two if you are pregnant? It is no wonder many people struggle to see through the mass of confusing advice, old wives' tales and health myths out there.

*Myth one:* A vasectomy is a protracted and painful procedure that could damage your sex life.

*The truth:* According to the Marie Stopes charity, a vasectomy is a relatively simple and painless procedure that only takes a few minutes to perform. It does not affect the sex life or performance.

*Myth two:* Acne is caused by not washing properly.

*The truth:* Acne is caused by the effects of hormones on sebaceous glands. This is why it particularly affects teenagers and can also be increased by stress. Cleaning your face too often can actually increase acne as the body compensates to replace the body oil washed away.

*Myth three:* Depressed people need to 'pull themselves together' and then they will be fine.

*The truth:* Depression is an illness involving an imbalance of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters. It is not a character flaw or a sign of personal weakness. You cannot make yourself well by trying to 'snap out of it'. Counseling and medication may be needed to treat depression, and a doctor should be consulted.

*Myth four:* You should always rest during your period.

*The truth:* You should do whatever makes you feels comfortable, but do not be afraid to exercise. It is a good way of controlling PMS by

increasing endorphins, the 'happy hormone', and helps cramps by increasing the supply of oxygen to the muscles.

*Myth five:* A lump in your breast means you have breast cancer.

*The truth:* About 80 per cent of breast lumps are benign (non-cancerous). Sometimes there can be cysts, nipple discharges and calcification (calcium salt deposits in breast tissues) resulting from injury or bruising, hormonal changes or infection. However, should you find a lump you must contact a health professional straight away - catching cancer early significantly increases the chances of recovery.

*Myth six:* Cholesterol is bad for you.

*The truth:* Cholesterol is a fatty substance that is made mostly by the liver. We all need some blood cholesterol as it is used to build cells and make vital hormones – without cholesterol we would be very ill or dead.

*Myth seven:* Bananas are fattening.

*The truth:* They are actually low in fat. There is only half a gram of fat and 95 calories in a banana. Not only that but they are packed with potassium.

*Myth eight:* It is OK to skip breakfast.

*The truth:* Breakfast is a very important meal. When we are sleeping, we 'fast' for an average of about eight hours, so it is essential to 'break' this fast. Although people who skip breakfast catch up on their energy requirements later in the day, they are unlikely to get all the vitamins and minerals that a simple breakfast can provide. Try porridge with honey for a wholesome but filling meal.

*Myth nine:* There is no need to worry about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It only takes a course of antibiotics and you are fine!

*The truth:* It is true that most sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be completely cured if they are caught at an early stage, and the treatment may be as simple as a course of antibiotics. However, if left untreated, STIs can pose a long-term risk to your health and fertility.

The infections chlamydia and gonorrhea can both lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) if they are not treated. This can, in turn lead to long-term pelvic pain, blocked Fallopian tubes, infertility and ectopic pregnancy in women, and pain and inflammation of the testicles and the prostate gland in men.

Genital warts and genital herpes are two common viral infections, and antibiotics will not treat them. They can be treated with antiviral medications, but both conditions can recur.

*Myth 10:* People are overweight because they have slow metabolisms.

*The truth:* Unfortunately, a slow metabolism is no excuse for being overweight. In fact, recent studies revealed that fat people have faster metabolisms and burn off more energy than slimmer people simply to keep their bodies going.

*Note:* The above listing is not based on order of popularity.