



Lists of 'bad' foods often not helpful

I often see website ads that say, "Never eat these foods." Sometimes there is a picture of a banana. I have never clicked on those ads, but I am curious. Shouldn't we eat bananas? And what other foods shouldn't we eat?

If you did click on those ads or did a web search for "never eat these foods," you might be surprised to find just how many foods different people say we shouldn't eat.

But rest assured, the official position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the professional organization of registered dietitians, is that any food can fit into a healthful diet. Its list of "foods to avoid" is nonexistent, unless you have allergies or other sensitivities to consider.

In fact, the academy states in a 2013 position paper, "Some health and nutrition professionals and many 'pseudo-experts' promote specific types of foods to choose or avoid. A more responsible and effective approach is to help consumers understand and apply the principles of healthy diet and lifestyle choices."

Targeting certain foods as "bad" can be counter-productive. It encourages black-and-white thinking, which only offers a sense of control as long as a person avoids foods on the "bad" list. Too often, people eventually succumb to temptation, leading them to spiral out of control.

Instead of "never eat these foods," registered dietitians prefer to encourage thoughtful decisions such as "I can occasionally enjoy a small portion," or "No, I won't indulge today." Helping people, especially those trying to lose weight, to make moderate food choices is a more sustainable approach to healthful eating than giving them lists of "good" and "bad" foods.

But, just to satisfy your curiosity, just what foods are on those "do not eat" lists? It really depends on who's writing them. Some list specific food or restaurant items that are much higher in calories, sugar, sodium or fat than you might realize. Some list foods that can cause spikes in blood sugar -- including fruit juice and, yes, bananas, which can offer health benefits. Others list broad categories of foods such as bread and pasta, processed foods, or foods made with genetically modified crops.

The authors of such lists often cite studies to support their arguments. But is it science or pseudo-science? It's often difficult for consumers to tell the difference. That's why it's important to look for reliable sources to help you evaluate such questions. The academy is a good place to start. Check its website at <http://eatright.org>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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