

MythBusters: Examining Common Nutrition Myths

- ◆ Americans' interest in nutrition and diet is at an all time high, doubling from seven percent in 2005 to 16 percent just two years later. According to the 2007 International Food and Information Council's Consumer Attitude Survey, Americans' top health concerns are heart disease (53 percent), weight (33 percent), cancer (24 percent) and diabetes (17 percent).
- ◆ According to the American Dietetic Association, consumers obtain most of their nutrition information from the media, with the top three sources cited as television, magazines and newspapers. Registered dietitians, experts in providing accurate nutrition information to consumers, were cited as a source by only one percent of respondents. (Source: Nutrition and You: Trends 2000 Survey)
- ◆ In 2005, more than 11,000 pages in American consumer magazines were devoted to food and nutrition, and consumers are trusting in what they read. In fact, a 2006 survey found that 42 percent of consumers reported diet-related changes based on information found in health and fitness magazines. (Source: American Council on Science and Health, December 2005)
- ◆ Unfortunately, media reports and nutrition studies can often be contradictory, leaving consumers confused. *The Washington Post* pointed out that in November 2007, a study reported that being overweight, over-indulging in red meat and alcohol and inactivity increase cancer risk. Just days later, government scientists issued a report that being overweight does not increase the risk of dying prematurely from cancer.
- ◆ Americans are increasingly interested in getting to the bottom of common myths – "Mythbusters" is one of *The Discovery Channel's* top-rated programs, with the fall 2007 season premier attracting more than 2.6 million viewers. (Source: *USA Today*, January 15, 2008)
- ◆ Snopes.com, a popular Web site that examines myths and legends and draws almost 6 million visitors per month, lists 84 food-related myths – only slightly more than 20 can be confirmed as true.
- ◆ Nutrition and health experts have named the following as some of the most enduring food myths: Dairy foods are fattening, eating sugar causes diabetes and eating carbohydrates makes you overweight.
- ◆ Food myths can often lead to harmful dietary omissions and affect the health and well-being of consumers. In a recent report, consumers most vulnerable to dietary myths and health care fraud are older Americans. (Source: American Dietetic Association, Position Paper, June 2006)