
Will eating supper make you fat?



Is late night eating a surefire way to gain weight? Is diet soda really useful for weight loss? Can drinking water, bathing or walking after a meal impair your digestion?

Dr Shanker Pasupathy, Senior Consultant and Director of the LIFE Centre, Singapore General Hospital (SGH) answers these and other food- and mealtime-related questions, debunking popular nutrition myths and presenting the facts.

Myth 1: Diet soda can help you lose weight

Fact: Drinking diet sodas have fewer calories, but they can't help you lose weight if you are otherwise overeating on high calorie foods, and not burning the excess calories through exercise. There is also some evidence that having artificial sweeteners can promote a preference for sweet-tasting foods.

Myth 2: Snacking causes weight gain

Fact: Having snacks in between meals may help you avoid the urge to overeat or binge later. The benefit is in eating healthy snacks, not unhealthy ones. In fact, some dietitians recommend that you have five small meals a day, instead of eating all your calories in three big meals. Snacking provides an opportunity to eat healthy foods that you would normally not eat at mealtimes, such as fruits, low-fat yoghurt and nuts. However frequent snacking on high fat / sugar foods can lead to weight gain.

Myth 3: Brisk walking or showering after a meal will affect your digestion

Fact: It is safe to take a stroll after a meal but brisk walking or any intense activity or workout will divert the blood flow from the stomach to other parts of the body, affecting the digestive process. It is best to wait at least an hour after your meal if you want to take a brisk walk. A hot shower will also divert the blood supply from the stomach to the skin, but the effect is not significant and will not impact digestion.

Myth 4: Drinking water during or after a meal is bad for digestion

Fact: Drinking water during or after a meal actually helps your digestion. Water helps in the breakdown of food which enables the body to absorb the nutrients. Water also softens the stools which helps prevent constipation.

Myth 5: You will put on weight if you eat late at night

Fact: There's no conclusive proof that eating late at night can cause weight gain. Consuming more calories than you burn will cause weight gain, and the reason late-night snacking can be a problem is that many people snack on high-calorie foods at this time. However, eating just before you go to bed can cause indigestion, heartburn and other gastrointestinal problems. This is because the BMR (basal metabolic rate) increases after eating and sleeping right after a meal will decrease it, interfering with digestion.