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Friday, 5th March 2010

## Mark McLaughlin: Take all that healthy eating advice with a pinch of salt

**Published Date:** 04 March 2010

By Mark McLaughlin

IT OFTEN feels like doctors never tire of telling us what we shouldn't be doing. Cut out the booze, ditch the butter, junk the junk food – the list of instructions for healthy living seems endless.

If you feel like the killjoy medical profession is trying to end all your fun, then read on.

A new study has concluded that four cups of coffee a day may actually be good for you – or at least for your heart – after years of warnings about the unp

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pleasant side-effects of all that caffeine.

That research is only the latest to suggest positive results of eating and drinking things often painted as forbidden fruit.

Scientists have recently claimed that everything from chocolate to Chinese takeaways, and from wine to the much-maligned fish supper can be good for you.

It is all, if nothing else, a recipe for confusion.

Nutritionist Sarah Stelling, of the Edinburgh Centre of Nutrition & Therapy in Tollcross, says there is no need to get too hung up about all the dos and don'ts, as long as you remember the rule your mother probably told you – "everything in moderation".

So, if you want any inspiration for a little indulgence, here are a few possibilities.

### **COFFEE**

Cardiologist Dr Arthur Klatsky found those who drank four or more cups of coffee each day had an 18 per cent lower risk of heart rhythm disturbances.

Dr Klatsky told the American Heart Association's 50th annual conference in San Francisco this week: "Coffee drinking is related to lower risk of hospitalisation for rhythm problems, but the association does not prove cause and effect, or that coffee has a protective effect.

"However, these data might be reassuring to people who drink moderate amounts of coffee that their habit is not likely to cause a major rhythm disturbance."

A report from the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid in Spain showed that drinking three cups of coffee a day could reduce the risk of women dying from heart disease by a quarter.

Another showed that men who drank five or more cups of coffee were 44 per cent less likely to die from the disease.

Drinking two to three cups of coffee a day was also shown to reduce the risk of a stroke by almost 20 per cent.

Experts at the Tohoku University School of Medicine in Japan concluded certain chemicals found in caffeine protect the body's DNA against damage that can lead to cancer.

### **CHOCOLATE**

A new study has found that a bar of chocolate a week could reduce your chances of a stroke.

The study, conducted by the University of Toronto and set to go before The American Academy of Neurology's 62nd annual meeting next month, found that chocolate-eaters were 22 per cent less likely to suffer a stroke.

Author Sarah Sahib puts the results down to the anti-oxidant flavanoids. She said: "More research is needed to determine whether chocolate truly lowers stroke risk, or whether healthier people are simply more likely to eat chocolate than others."

### **RED WINE**

Red wine holds an almost mythic reputation as an elixir of health and there is some scientific evidence to back up the myth.

A study by Barts, the London School of Medicine and the Queen Mary University in London highlighted a mechanism in red wine that appeared to interfere with a body chemical responsible for clogging up the arteries.

Research by the Institute of Preventive Medicine in Copenhagen showed that a daily glass of red wine increased good cholesterol by up to 16 per cent, and reduced the clotting compound fibrinogen by up to 15 per cent.

### **WHITE WINE**

White wine has also been shown to have some beneficial effects, with a 2008 study by the University of Buffalo suggesting that while both red and white wine can bolster lung function, white wine seems to have a more positive effect.

### **CHINESE TAKEAWAYS**

While a recent study by Edinburgh City Council found that 87 per cent of Chinese restaurant dishes, and 60 per cent of Indian restaurant dishes, served in the city contained over 3g of salt – half the recommended daily intake – its study did throw up some surprising results.

There were a few low-salt options including a lamb pasanda with 1.81g of salt, and a chicken korma with 1.91g.

Oriental food is also packed with health-promoting ingredients.

A 2006 study by the University of Michigan suggested that ginger could kill cancer cells, while a 2007 study by the University of Alabama found that allicin, found in garlic, relaxes the blood vessels and keeps blood flowing (as well as being chiefly responsible for garlic breath).

### **FISH & CHIPS**

The Seafish Authority promotes the benefits of eating two portions of seafood a week and says there is no reason why a fish supper should not be one of them.

"The minerals and vitamins in seafood promote clearer skin, shinier hair, higher energy levels and can even boost your brain power," says a spokesman for the authority.

## TOBACCO

OK, we're labouring the point now, but a book by controversial medic Dr William Campbell Douglass entitled *The Health Benefits of Tobacco* claims it "sharpens mental acuity and maintains optimal weight" while pointing out that "many of the countries that smoke the most, have the longest lifespan".

Dr Douglass also believes that HIV was created by the World Health Organisation to keep the population down, so you can make up your own mind on his theories.

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- **Last Updated:** 04 March 2010 9:16 AM
- **Source:** Edinburgh Evening News
- **Location:** Edinburgh

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