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Health newsletter for ex-pat Sri Lankans, globally

# Health & Views

## Risk Factors for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Chronic fatigue syndrome can occur at any age for men or women. Learn more about the causes of this... [Read more...](#)

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## Debunked Health Myths



Can cracking your knuckles cause arthritis? Read about common myths and the truth behind each one.

You might be irritating others with these popping noises, but cracking knuckles won't give you arthritis. That popping noise comes from bubbles bursting in your joint fluid.

That doesn't make this habit harmless, though. If you regularly crack your knuckles, you are putting yourself at risk of swollen hands. Chronic knuckle-crackers are also more likely to lose some of their grip strength.

MedicineNet



Are eggs linked to high blood cholesterol? Eggs pack lots of cholesterol compared to other foods. Cholesterol in the blood is strongly related to heart disease and heart attacks. So, eating lots of eggs should be bad for your heart, right? It seems true, but most nutritional studies say otherwise.

As many as one egg per day does not raise your risk of cardiovascular disease—which can lead to heart attack—for people with normal cholesterol. That could be because eggs have other heart-protecting properties beyond cholesterol. It may also be because eating cholesterol is only weakly associated with raising cholesterol in your blood. Whatever the reason, your egg habit probably won't harm your heart if done in moderation.

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## Over active thyroid

Sweating more and being sensitive to heat are notable symptoms of hyperthyroidism. Your thyroid gland controls your metabolism, so when it makes too much hormone, your body goes into overdrive. Your body temperature rises, and you could be hungrier or thirstier, have a racing pulse or shaking hands, feel tired and out of sorts, get diarrhea, and lose weight.

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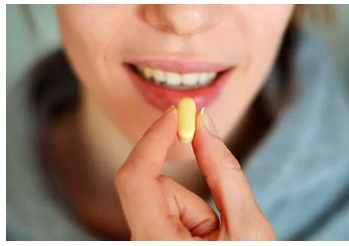
## Multivitamins- should you take?

Vitamins seem healthy in principal. They are full of the nutrients that let our bodies fight disease, let our cells grow, and let our organs do their work. So taking a daily dose of vitamins seems beneficial, right?

Not so fast. Vitamins aren't harmless. Taking supplements of beta-carotene and vitamins A and E have been linked with an increased death rate. What's more, well-nourished adults don't get any disease-fighting benefit or any other benefit from taking extra vitamins. Most Americans get all the vitamins they need from their diets, and extra isn't helpful. Even so, lots of health-conscious adults are taking multivitamins in America today. The supplemental use of vitamins has risen from about 40% of the adult population in the early 1990s to more than half today. Lots of people take their vitamins "just in case," but many doctors say money spent on multivitamins is wasted. "The multivitamin-as-insurance-policy is an old wives' tale and we need to debunk it," nutritionist Dr. Miriam Nelson said.

All that being said, some people should take supplements. Your doctor can advise you if you are pregnant or face a particular health problem that would benefit from them. But if you're generally healthy, multivitamins won't do anything to help—and may actually harm—your health. Nutritionists agree that the healthiest way to get vitamins into your body is through fruits and vegetables.

MedicineNet



## Does Eating Breakfast Help You Lose Weight?



You've probably heard that skipping breakfast makes it tougher to lose weight. Is that true? Probably not. Though some evidence seems to point that way, that evidence has been criticized for bias, including misrepresenting its own data and the scholarship of other researchers. The argument for breakfast-as-weight-loss-cure goes like this: if you eat in the morning, you won't be as hungry during the day and you will eat fewer calories at night while your body is least active. Studies have shown that it doesn't much matter, though, when you get your calories. For the most part your body treats a calorie like a calorie whether you eat it at night or in the morning.

There is one study that found some health difference between skipping breakfast and skipping dinner, however. In that study, subjects who skipped breakfast had evidence of elevated inflammation in their blood. This could potentially be a reason to eat breakfast in the morning, but breakfast health benefits haven't been conclusively proven. Another study found that people lost weight if they switched their routine, either from starting a new breakfast routine or by starting to skip breakfast. In both cases, dieters who changed the time when they usually ate their calories lost more weight.

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## Are Vaccines Harmful?

Vaccines have been under fire. Fear of vaccines has led many parents to delay them or avoid them altogether in the treatment of their children. Are the fears justified? Can vaccines cause harm?

Vaccines, like any other medication, can cause side effects. These are almost always minor, such as a small red bump developing where the needle went in. Rarely allergies are triggered by vaccines, and doctors and nurses are trained to look for them. It's not a bad idea to keep an eye on your child for signs of allergic reaction for a few days after vaccination.

The downside to the shot is a little inconvenience. The upside is protection from extremely dangerous and often deadly diseases. Diseases like polio, measles, and whooping cough have been successfully controlled by vaccines, but outbreaks have been seen now that vaccine scares are on the rise. Don't believe the fear. For the protection of all children, it is wisest and best to have yours vaccinated.

# Does Sugar Make Kids Hyper?

You and your kids are enjoying a boisterous Halloween party full of candy and other sweets. As the night moves on, they won't settle down and just don't listen when you say it's time to leave. Sound familiar? A lot of parents would attribute this unruly behavior to the sugar their kids just ate. But sugar doesn't seem to do anything to promote hyperactive behavior in kids.

This myth continues because it depends on who you ask. When parents were instructed to add or remove sugar from their children's meals, these parents thought they saw their kids' behavior change. They reported links between sugar and hyperactivity. That may be because of a popular diet in the early 1970s called the Feingold Diet, which called on parents to remove sugar and other food additives to help calm their children. That diet has been discredited, but many parents now expect restless kids after feeding them sugar. When researchers are the ones observing, though, they can't find any difference between sugared-up kids and kids who eat no sugar.

In one study, kids were chosen who were supposedly sensitive to sugar, along with regular kids. Researchers gave the kids sugar and two sugar substitutes to see how these different chemicals changed their behaviors. What they found was that there weren't any significant differences between any of the kids. That would seem to put this myth to rest, but the idea that sugar causes hyperactivity persists.

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## You Only Use 10% of Your Brain?

If you only used 10% of the brain, does that mean you could remove 90% and be fine? People who support this common claim say that if you were able to use the rest of your mental power you could unlock tremendous abilities hiding deep within. The only trouble? It's not at all true.

It could be that 1930s rat studies led to this idea. In these studies, parts of rats' brains were removed and the rats could still perform basic tasks. But that was only a specific portion of the rodents' brains, and the rats may have had other deficiencies that weren't tested.

Wherever the myth came from, it remains a myth. Brain scans clearly show that no matter what activity you do, your brain is active and engaged. Sure, some parts of the brain are "turned on" for some activities more than others, but there aren't any areas that aren't used.

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## Can You Catch Diseases From a Toilet Seat?

You may not be thrilled to use a public toilet, but for the most part, you need not fear catching any diseases from one. To understand why, it helps to remember that disease-causing microbes are everywhere. You can find them on your keyboard, on doorknobs, on money, and even on your smartphone. Yes, they're probably



on the toilet seat too, but which one do think is cleaned more often--a toilet or your phone? Which one do you hold closer to your face? Compared to other objects you touch every day, the toilet is not a significant source of disease-carrying microbes.

One myth that needs to be quashed is the one about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Can you really catch an STI from a toilet seat? Almost certainly not. These diseases survive and spread from skin-to-skin contact, and once they hit cold porcelain, they are soon dead. There has never been a single reported case of an STI transmitted by sitting on a toilet seat.

All the same, there are a few more common microbial diseases that may be spread from toilet seats. The good news is that the risk is nearly eliminated just by washing your hands. Those diseases include E. coli, Strep, and Staph microbes, as well as the microbes (viruses) responsible for colds and flu. But remember--these disease-causing microbes need a way into your body, and merely resting on your skin won't cut it. Most need to contact your mucus membranes--your eyes, nose, or mouth--to do any damage. So, if you avoid touching your face before washing your hands, chances are you'll be just fine.

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# Does Homeopathy Treat or Cure

## Disease?

Homeopathy is the practice of mixing a tiny amount of a drug or herb into water in an attempt to reverse the drug or herb's effects. Homeopathic practitioners believe water can retain the "memory" of a drug in this way. It's been practiced since the 1700s, a time when modern medicine frequently killed its patients, and at that time the relative harmlessness of homeopathy (the cures were essentially water) led many to assume it worked.

Scientists have now studied homeopathy hundreds of times. They've reviewed the evidence from these studies over a dozen times in metastudies. The result? They all "failed to provide strong evidence in favor of homeopathy," according to physician and trained homeopath Edzard Ernst, who wrote a review of the metastudies.

Homeopathic treatments continue to be sold in pharmacies and supermarkets, even though they are often little more than water. They don't need to prove their effectiveness to be placed next to other medicines. This may change, however, as the FDA has introduced new rules making it tougher for homeopathic remedies to find a place next to scientifically proven medicine on drug store shelves.



# Can You Detoxify Your Body?

Does your body need a cleanse to flush itself of toxins? The idea is appealing. If you could rid your body of bad chemicals that would give you more energy, mental focus, or better sleep, wouldn't you do it? There's also something satisfying about taking bad things out of your body, especially if you're told it will cure another health problem. So does detoxifying your body work?

For doctors to know if a detoxification therapy works, they need to know two things. First, they need to know what toxin is being removed from the body. Second, they need to know how it will be removed. A group of scientists reviewed 15 products that claim to detoxify your body. The products ranged from face scrubs to bottled water. Most of the companies selling these products simply renamed ordinary processes like cleaning or brushing, calling them "detoxifying." For example, one of those face scrubs "detoxified" dirt and makeup--exactly what you would expect any facial scrub to do. The investigators said these companies could neither explain how they removed toxins nor what "toxins" their products were designed to remove. In other words, they simply used "detox" as an advertising buzzword.

So if a product claims to cleanse your colon, chelate your kidneys, or help you sweat out toxins, think twice before purchasing. Legitimate detoxification happens in a hospital, and usually only when something has seriously gone wrong, like in patients with heavy metal poisoning or medical treatment of an alcoholic.

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# Can Special Products Boost Your Immune System?

Many products claim to improve or "boost" your immune system in some way. But they tend to be fuzzy on the specifics. You should ask yourself, "What part of the immune system does it boost?" Your immune system is a complex series of processes involving antibodies, certain proteins, parts of your blood (including white blood cells), and much more. When a product simply says it "boosts immunity," but doesn't say how, that should raise a red flag.

What's more, there are ways your immune system can be elevated that would be harmful to your body. One of the most important aspects of your immune function is inflammation, the natural process your body enacts to fight off bacteria, viruses, and anything in your body that your cells don't recognize as a part of your body. Activating your inflammatory response is one way a product can boost your immune system, but it would also be boosting your risk of stroke, heart attack, and other health problems.

Your best shot at improving your immune response is to follow the health basics: get plenty of sleep, exercise regularly, and eat healthy foods. Even in these areas, research is ongoing and plenty of controversy remains.

