



The latest news: “Low-T” therapy equals high risk for heart attack and stroke

I've written before about the dangers of “Low-T” treatments. Now, other publications are really starting to get the word out to the men who need to know.

The newest message? Testosterone therapy is not only unnecessary for many men, but it can actually cause heart attacks and strokes. It may even kill you.

In fact, as I was reading the June issue of *American Legion Magazine* (a frequent source of useful health information), I came across an article cautioning men considering testosterone therapy. The article notes that while the number of men using prescription testosterone gels or injections is increasing, so is evidence that these men are putting themselves at increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

The good news is that help is on the way, albeit from the last source you might expect: the government. That's right—in June, the FDA announced that all FDA-approved testosterone products must carry a warning label about the risk of blood clots in the veins.¹

This follows the January announcement that the FDA is investigating the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and death in men who take FDA-approved testosterone products.²

Amazingly, the FDA was quick to add that its warning about blood

clots has nothing to do with its investigation into heart attacks and strokes.

That claim is mind-boggling. Blood clots are the final event causing heart attacks and strokes in people with cardiovascular disease. So if Low-T treatments increase the risk of blood clots, by definition, they also increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

This fact is Pathology 101 everywhere but among the medical “experts” at the FDA.

Fortunately, other influential groups are also raising concerns about Low-T. In February, the U.S. Endocrine Society released a statement calling for more clinical trials to investigate the risks of heart attacks and strokes in older men who take testosterone.³

This is the same group of experts that has questioned the use of statin drugs. Statins lower cholesterol, which is the building block of all hormones. Since testosterone is a hormone, one might well wonder whether the current epidemic of Low-T is at least partially a result of so many men taking statin drugs.

The Endocrine Society went so far as to say it would be prudent “not to administer testosterone therapy to men who have had a cardiovascular event in the preceding six months.”

What spurred this announcement? Two analyses and a recent six-year

clinical trial of more than 1,200 men supported by the Veterans Affairs Administration found a higher rate of heart attacks and strokes in men with pre-existing heart problems who were given testosterone.⁴

In addition, a large study published in January reported that men 65 and older who took testosterone for just three months doubled their heart attack risk.⁵

If that weren't bad enough, other research shows that testosterone is a risk factor for prostate cancer. That's why men with prostate cancer can end up having their testicles removed.⁶ Testosterone therapy has also been linked to enlarged prostate, shrunken testicles, and low sperm count or sterility. Even acne is a side effect—the same problem that occurs

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in adolescent males when they get their first surge of testosterone.⁷

As wave after wave of studies raise serious questions about testosterone therapy, a growing number of medical experts are concurring with my early warnings about the appropriateness and safety of Low-T treatments.

But guess who doesn't agree? Big pharma.

Now that there are profitable drugs for treating Low-T, the obvious risks of testosterone are being questioned. Doctors who frequently prescribe testosterone are saying they feel insulted by the implication that they are in any way influenced by the relentless advertising that urges patients to talk to them about the "horrors" of Low-T.

But drug companies wouldn't keep running those annoying advertisements, over and over again, if they weren't working.

Don't fall victim to the Low-T hype. Here's what you need to know.

Less is more when it comes to Low-T treatments

The New Jersey state attorney general asked me to serve on a panel a couple of years ago to help revise the state regulations governing prescription testosterone treatments.

The AG's goal was to save New Jersey taxpayers some money. It turns out that the state was paying over \$2 million a year for testosterone treatments for public employees. This included thousands of healthy young men—police and firefighters—who in no way needed such treatments.

Still, doctors were prescribing them. Our panel investigated several physicians who were operating "testosterone mills," prescribing treatments without appropriate

clinical guidelines and without the appropriate clinical background and training to do so. Fortunately, with our help, state regulators were able to put a stop to these abuses.

Unfortunately, it can be more difficult to apply that approach in the private sector. True health care reform would consist of implementing the successful "less is more" philosophy by cutting out dangerous, inappropriate, and invasive therapies and replacing them with safer, effective, and more cost-effective natural approaches.

This is particularly true for testosterone therapy. But the anti-aging movement is a powerful combatant in the Low-T wars.

"Testosterone is currently enjoying a reputation for being the elixir of youth, and there is a whole group of men who have low testosterone because of aging," said Bradley Anawalt, chair of the Endocrine Society's Hormone Health Network, in *Medscape Medical News*. "And we just don't know if they can benefit from testosterone."

He pointed to the history of other hormone therapies, such as estrogen-replacement therapy. The serious risks of estrogen therapy became clear only after thousands of women took it for decades. Do we really want history to repeat itself?

The Endocrine Society published a study in January reporting that the number of men beginning testosterone therapy in the U.S. has almost quadrupled since 2000. Even though many of these men don't have any actual medical reason for Low-T treatments.⁸

And shortly afterwards, the *New York Times* printed an editorial stating, "Too many doctors are now writing testosterone prescriptions

without even measuring the patient's hormone levels, much less re-testing for confirmation and adjusting the dose after prescription."⁹

Hmmm...seems like those big pharma ads are having some influence after all.

Modern-day Ponce de Leons risking their lives for that mythical Fountain of Youth

The question of who should even receive testosterone therapy remains controversial. I fear far too many men don't actually have truly troubling symptoms, but instead are just having trouble accepting the fact that they are getting older. And treatments for Low-T are really becoming just another entry on the sad list of dangerous "anti-aging" remedies.

The fact is, there is not enough **long-term** data to accurately assess the risks of continuing on this treatment.¹⁰

Case in point: One recent study looked at men age 65 or older with low testosterone. The researchers found that the men who were given testosterone treatments had more heart and blood vessel problems than the men who didn't get the treatments.¹¹

The study actually had to be *discontinued* because researchers were worried about how dangerous the Low-T therapy proved to be.

The bottom line?

We should stop fixating on "hormone replacement" by artificial methods. Men don't need to use dangerous patches and gels to replace waning testosterone.

In fact, by doing so, they are actually messing with Mother Nature.

You see, while higher testosterone at younger ages is important for procreation, losing testosterone after the typical age of reproduction probably helps men survive longer by lowering their risk of cardiovascular

diseases and prostate cancer—the most common "old age" diseases in men.

It's interesting to note that while the average lifespan continues to increase, there have historically always been some men who have outlived their brethren. So perhaps Low-T in older men is a biological adaption resulting from natural selection.

Of course, that doesn't mean you can't and shouldn't look at ways to support the body's natural youthfulness. When you do that, natural testosterone production in men stays stronger, longer.

The effects on the body and normal metabolic balance caused by any drug treatment are always different than when the body is supported naturally with nutrients to produce what it needs in a balanced manner. This distinction is especially critical when it comes to hormonal balance.

Taking any hormone drug is playing with fire. Whether it's corticosteroids for suppressing the normal immune system, or hormones for their effects on disrupting normal metabolic balance, or testosterone for "anti-aging." All of these suppress normal, natural hormone production and disrupt metabolic balance.

For men, eating right with adequate protein...keeping up with regular, light-to-moderate exercise...maintaining lean muscle...and getting plenty of sleep can help support natural testosterone levels. This approach just makes sense. And you will help keep your testosterone at the right, natural level.

Plus, a study last year showed that a combination of South African red bush and simple dandelion supports testicular cells in lab animals to naturally make more of their own testosterone.¹²

And men who took this same red bush-dandelion supplement for only two to three months enjoyed notably increased physical strength and performance—including marked improvements in walking ability, which is strongly linked to increased longevity.

That's not anti-aging; that's just healthy aging. 

Citations available online at www.DrMicozzi.com

Put your testosterone to the test

Low testosterone levels can cause fatigue and reduced sex drive. But so can depression, poor relationships, unbalanced diets, or lack of regular exercise or sleep.

To determine if Low-T is really the culprit behind your symptoms, you must have your testosterone levels measured by a qualified specialist in internal medicine or endocrinology and metabolism. And remember that measurements are most accurate between 7 and 10 am. Don't let them schedule you for a later appointment.

Even if tests show that your testosterone levels are substandard, Low-T treatments may not be appropriate if you are at high risk for prostate cancer, have severe urinary symptoms or prostate enlargement, have had a heart attack or stroke, or have multiple risk factors for heart disease.

If you do opt for testosterone therapy, be sure to follow up with tests to see whether the treatments are having an effect. Your doctor will also need to pay particular attention to your heart, cardiovascular, and prostate health.

Real relief for heartbreaking cases of psoriasis

A thoughtful reader recently asked a question about psoriasis, and I quickly provided a short answer. But it got me thinking a lot more about this challenging condition.

Psoriasis is a mind-body disorder that presents a mystery to mainstream medicine. Conventional medicine likes to define every disorder as either physical or mental (with all the stigma attached). But taking this “simple-minded” approach means all conditions that have connections to the mind and the body are inherently—and unfortunately—mysterious to the mainstream.

In fact, some years back, psoriasis was simply described as “the heartbreak” by a large, and seemingly relentless, big pharma advertising campaign. Indeed, psoriasis can be a heartbreaking condition. Unfortunately, the cures peddled as magic bullets by the mainstream won't ease your pain. Worse, some toxic chemicals and treatments promoted as “natural” are anything but.

Fortunately, there are truly natural remedies that can effectively address both the mental and physical components of psoriasis. I'll get to those in a moment. But first, let's take a closer look at some of the disastrous mainstream AND natural “cures” that have been foisted on psoriasis sufferers.

Five psoriasis “miracles” that fall flat

Steroids. Psoriasis treatments that contain steroids knock out your immune system for a while, which can give some temporary relief. But using steroids to manage your psoriasis on an ongoing basis can lead to thinning of the skin, skin infections, and other complications,

not to mention disruptions to your normal immune system.

And the last thing you want to have is thin, infected skin without a normal immune response, especially with dangerous and deadly untreatable skin infections like MRSA lurking around every hospital and many gyms.

Coal tar. There are a variety of ridiculously expensive gels, lotions, and shampoos advertised as containing “natural” coal tar derivatives to treat psoriasis. Popular brands include Exorex, Elta Tar, and Psoriasin.

Coal tar is what's left over after they clean out the bottom of the catalytic cracking tanks used to refine crude oil for petroleum products like gasoline, heating oil, and kerosene. (You may have seen my former colleague Mike Rowe cleaning one out on his TV show, “Dirty Jobs.”). The oil industry would normally have to pay someone to haul coal tar away, but the cosmetic industry figured out a way to get this residue for next to nothing and pass it on to consumers at its usual exorbitant prices.

The FDA does allow coal tar to be marketed for psoriasis, and coal-tar treatments have been used for decades to try to manage skin and scalp conditions.

But unless you are in the habit of bathing at the local tar pit or gas station, it really doesn't seem very natural.

Neem oil. This plant oil is another “natural” remedy for psoriasis. Made from the seeds of the neem tree, it's found in a variety of cosmetics, and is also used as a pesticide. Because it's an oil, it may make your skin look less dry and flaky. But it may not really be treating the underlying psoriasis, and it has the potential to actually irritate your skin.

Nystatin. This drug is an oral antifungal cream sometimes used to treat psoriasis. The problem is, psoriasis is not caused by a fungus. And the side effects of this treatment include itching, irritation, burning, and skin rash. In other words, it may very well make psoriasis symptoms worse.

Zinc. Back in 1994, a clinical trial found that taking zinc supplements didn't reduce psoriasis. But more recently, some studies have suggested that using zinc creams while taking zinc supplements may be beneficial.

I would not rely solely on zinc treatments to manage psoriasis, but it is important for everybody to maintain healthy zinc levels in any case. Your body does not store zinc, so it's key to get adequate daily intakes from food or supplements. Oysters, crab, beef, and beans are good dietary sources. A good starting point for zinc supplementation is 40 mg a day.

Unfortunately, the fact is that none of these “cures” is likely to offer significant, long-term relief of psoriasis.

But that doesn't mean you just have to live with this painful condition.

Mother Nature knows best

I've found that what remains a mystery to modern medicine in regard to psoriasis seems like common sense to any natural practitioner: Follow the old-fashioned Nature Cure, including the following components:

Rethink bath time. Do not shower or shampoo too often—it removes the natural oils from your skin and scalp and dries them out. To stay clean, consider a bidet, douche, or sitz bath (European traditions), which keep your private parts clean without having to take a full shower or bath.

When you do bathe or shower, use

warm water. Hot water removes skin oils. For a soothing bath, add sea salts, mineral salts, oatmeal, or fragrant nut oils like almond.

Moisturize. After bathing, use fragrance-free skin moisturizers. Cetaphil and Eucerin creams are reported to have good results. Lightweight lotions don't have the staying power to provide much help.

Soak up the sun. For reasons that remain mysterious to dermatologists (the same experts who want you to avoid the sun altogether), exposure to sunlight is actually good for the skin.

Your healthcare practitioner may prescribe ultraviolet light treatments, but tanning beds don't produce the same healing benefits and may actually

be harmful. You're better off spending 15-20 minutes per day in direct sunlight (without sunscreen). This exposure may improve your psoriasis symptoms as well as help maintain healthy vitamin D levels in your skin and body.


De-stress. Mind-body treatments like hypnosis, relaxation, biofeedback, acupuncture, yoga, and others may all help with psoriasis. Take the Emotional Type Quiz at www.drnicozzi.com to see which approach will work best for your individual type.

You can also reduce stress by getting enough physical exercise and sleep and following a healthy, balanced diet.

Reach out to others. An estimated

125 million people worldwide have psoriasis, so you are not alone. Use in-person or online support groups to discuss your feelings—which may include depression, discouragement, and isolation—as well as the types of treatment you find effective or ineffective.

With psoriasis, one of the most frustrating experiences is that what works for one person may not work for another. We are all individuals. That's another reason why my Emotional Type Quiz is important for anyone using any type of mind-body therapy.

Managing your psoriasis can be a lifelong pursuit, but don't give up. Find out what works for you. 

Coffee: A jolt of good health

If you think of coffee as a vice, it's time for a wake-up call. Coffee is actually a natural product with much more healing potential per cup than the highly (and erroneously) touted green tea.

As I reported in the April issue* of *Insiders' Cures*, you may have to drink *16 cups* a day of green tea to get the optimal health benefits. But with coffee, you can get substantial health benefits from as little as *two cups* a day.

New research on coffee and caffeine continues to show benefits for both body and mind. A few cups of joe a day can help lower your risk of diabetes, keep your liver healthy, stave off depression, and dramatically reduce your risk of developing Parkinson's disease. It can also lower the risk of prostate cancer recurrence and progression (see sidebar).

And another recent study of more than 400,000 men and women ages 50 to 71 found that over a 13-year period,

the people who drank coffee were *less likely to die* from any cause than those who didn't.¹

I'll share more details on these benefits in just a moment. But first, it's interesting to examine the evolving attitudes towards coffee.

Attitude change is brewing

When I was a child, I was routinely given milk with a little coffee, warmed up together (it has a different taste and texture than adding cold milk to hot coffee). But as I got older, I became aware that coffee was considered a stimulant, a crutch, and even a vice.

I didn't want any of that, so I gave up this tradition, and all through college, medical school, and even my hospital medical residency, I never drank coffee (to the amazement of friends and colleagues).

In the early 1980s, a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* appeared to back up my choice. It reported that coffee drinking

was associated with an increased risk of deadly pancreatic cancer.

But not long thereafter, it was discovered that this research finding only applied to decaffeinated coffee, which can use toxic chemical solvents during the decaffeination process. I realized it wasn't the caffeine that was bad; it was the chemicals.

So, finally, when I became a Florida state medical examiner in Miami-Dade and surrounding counties, I started drinking coffee regularly. Really, it became a matter of survival. I would be called in the middle of the night and had to navigate territory greater than the size of Rhode Island, including large portions of a then-trackless Everglades, to conduct scene investigations—then go straight to the morgue to conduct the post-mortem examinations. My record was 10 cases over a 24-hour period (oddly, on Halloween). And, thanks to coffee, I was able to get through it.

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But it wasn't just helping me get through long nights and days. I also found that drinking a cup of coffee helped me with congestion from seasonal allergies, without antihistamines and their awful side effects. This makes perfect sense, since caffeine expands respiratory passages.² An ingredient in tea called theophylline has the same potential, but I found a couple cups of tea didn't do the trick—it just isn't strong enough.

From a medical standpoint, I saw the tide begin to turn toward coffee about 20 years ago. Around that time, I was asked to talk about coffee for a syndicated health TV program hosted by Mike Rowe I figured it would involve cautioning viewers about possible detriments to their health. But as I did the preparatory research, all I found were early hints about all of coffee's possible health benefits.

I enjoyed being interviewed by Mike Rowe and found him to be an unusually well-informed and

perceptive reporter. He struck me, even then, as a guy who was always willing to get his hands dirty for a story.

Since then, the research supporting coffee has just kept expanding. Let's take a look at the latest science showing how coffee and caffeine can help keep both your body and brain healthy.

Coffee, no sugar

A new study reports that drinking just two cups of coffee a day reduces your chance of getting diabetes by 12 percent.³

And another new study of more than 130,000 men and women shows for the first time that increasing your coffee consumption by as little as one cup a day reduces your diabetes risk by 11 percent.⁴

How does coffee do this? Researchers believe the caffeine in a cup of coffee may increase a hormone called adiponectin that affects insulin and blood sugar levels.

Love your liver

We're hearing a lot more these days about liver toxicity, which is often caused by acetaminophen (Tylenol), antidepressants, and other drugs. In fact, liver disease—including liver cancer, hepatitis, and cirrhosis—is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.⁵

Of course, the new drugs to treat liver problems are minting more multibillion-dollar biotech companies. But what big pharma doesn't want you to know is that a few cups of coffee a day can keep your liver healthy, without the costs or side effects of drugs.

A new study of more than 60,000 people in Singapore found that over a 15-year period, there was a strong association between higher coffee intake and lower risk of liver inflammation and death from liver failure.

In fact, researchers found that drinking two or more cups of coffee per day reduced the chances of dying

A latte good news about prostate cancer

I've pointed out before that many prostate "cancers" are actually occult cancers that don't metastasize and could never result in death. These occult cancers contribute to our modern epidemic of overdiagnosis and overtreatment by the cancer industry.

But for men who have a real prostate cancer that can spread or recur, there is some good news as close as your coffee pot.

According to a recent, five-year study of 630 men with prostate cancer, those who drank four or more cups of coffee per day had a *59 percent reduced risk* of their cancer spreading or recurring.⁸

This study confirms the findings of the Health Professionals Follow-up Study, which reported that men who drank six or more cups of coffee per day had a 60 percent lower risk of prostate cancer occurrence and death.⁹

There are many compounds in coffee thought to have potential anti-cancer properties, including caffeine. In fact, caffeine intake has been shown to reduce risk for skin, brain, and ovarian cancer as well. But the caffeine in tea doesn't appear to be as effective—in the first study I mentioned above, the tea drinkers didn't have any reduced risk of prostate cancer.

In the April issue of *Insiders' Cures*, I warned readers that despite tea's reputation, regular tea consumption is unlikely to show significant health benefits. Not to mention the many intentional and unintentional chemical additives and contaminants in tea that can actually pose a threat to your health.

So if you want to lower your risk of cancer and other diseases, you may want to switch to coffee. Or if a hot cup of joe sounds too steamy for a summer day, try iced rooibos—it's a healthier alternative to iced tea.

from liver failure by a whopping 66 percent.⁶ Meanwhile, green tea, black tea, and fruit juice had no impact on the risk of liver failure.

What's on your mind?

Antidepressants like Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil have been shown to cause liver toxicity and are only really effective for about 15 percent of people who are clinically depressed (see the *Daily Dispatch* "Popular drugs help only 1 in 7 patients."*)

But now, there is evidence that coffee is effective at treating both liver toxicity and depression.

In the study of 400,000 people I mentioned above, researchers looked

at all types of beverage consumption, including coffee. They discovered that people who drank four or more cans of soft drinks a day had a 30 percent higher chance of depression. That number increased to 38 percent for people who drank fruit drinks.


But for people who drank four or more cups of coffee a day, depression risk *decreased* by 10 percent. No association was observed for iced tea or hot tea.

But there is a caveat. Adding artificial sweeteners (but not sugar or honey) to your coffee actually increases your risk of becoming depressed.

Finally, a review of 26 studies

found that the risk of developing Parkinson's disease was 25 percent lower for caffeinated coffee drinkers.⁷

This research backs up other studies showing that coffee can have a powerful effect on Parkinson's disease. The caffeine in coffee is thought to affect the parts of the brain that control the onset and progression of the disease.

Considering all of this evidence, it seems coffee has a lot more going for it than helping to keep you awake. In fact, my "Miami vice" may very well end up being touted as the next health drink. 

Citations available online at www.DrMicozzi.com

7 sneaky foods that pretend to be healthy

In June, I sent out a *Daily Dispatch* e-mail about a new study that showed how people who take statin drugs are shooting themselves in the foot. Over time, statin users (now a whopping one-sixth of all Americans) eat 10 percent more calories and 14 percent more fat than the rest of the population. This is called the "statin gluttony" effect.

So all of these people are taking a pill to supposedly improve their health (despite sketchy-at-best benefits). Yet their resulting poor diets mean they end up losing the battle after all, in addition to suffering the awful side effects of these drugs.

But statin users aren't the only ones getting scammed in the quest for good health. Every day, people choose foods that seem healthy but really aren't. Here's a look at seven of these sneaky "health" foods.

#1: Banana chips. These snacks are made from a fruit that is naturally

high in potassium—and fruits and vegetables are generally healthy foods. But just like their unhealthy potato chip cousins, banana chips are deep fried in high-calorie oil.

Just half a cup of banana chips can have around 200 calories and 10 grams of saturated fat.¹

Meanwhile, a large, fresh banana is virtually fat free and contains only about 120 calories. Plus, it has more vitamins and minerals than banana chips, because frying can destroy vital nutrients. If you like bananas, you're much better off sticking with the whole, uncooked fruit.

#2: Energy bars. You can find energy bars sneaked into the grocery aisle with healthy foods, or even in the weight-loss section. But beware. Many of these crazed concoctions average 200 to 250 calories each.² And since most energy bars tend to be small, it's not unusual to down a couple a day as a supposedly nutritious "snack."

But then you find that you've eaten as many calories as you'd get in a healthy, large lunch or moderate dinner. In that sense, energy bars are meal "replacements," with all of the calories (and more) but few of the nutrients—and none of the enjoyment, satisfaction, or benefits of eating a real meal.

The sugar content can also be quite high, accounting for many of energy bars' empty calories, and making some of them no better than candy bars. And they're not even as tasty.

If you need a portable, "on-the-go" snack, try a hard-boiled egg or a fresh banana.

#3: Muesli. This is a health food store staple and hard to pronounce, so it must be good for you, right?

Wrong.

Muesli is marketed as a healthy alternative to sugary breakfast cereals.

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And while there are some brands that have fewer than 200 calories per serving, there are others that have a whopping 600 calories per cup—with high fat content and ridiculous amounts of added sugar, to boot.³

If you like having some sort of cereal in the morning, you can make your own healthy version. Buy bulk oats, sunflower seeds, dried fruits (cut into small bits), and some nuts, mix them together, and add low-fat milk. Alternately, eggs are a great, nutritious way to start the day.

#4: Prepared salads. There is nothing healthier than a fresh, green salad. But when you order a salad at a restaurant, watch out for the extra calories, fat, and sugar often used to dress it up so it tastes better.

If you trust the basic ingredients, ask for the dressing on the side. Or ask for olive oil and vinegar (or lemon) and dress your own salad at the table. And of course, you can also make these dressings at home. Don't ever buy or use prepared salad dressings. To keep your olive oil fresh, only buy as much as you will use in a three-month period.

#5: Sushi. This trendy food is bound to be good for you, right? After all, what could be healthier than raw fish (even if you're not a seal)?

While the nutrient content of sushi is indeed healthy, any uncooked food can pose a risk of infection or infestation with parasites. Although the high standards of real sushi restaurants present a minimal risk, watch out for the proliferation of "sushi-on-the-side" eateries where chefs aren't well versed in proper sushi preparation.

You also need to be careful of mercury contamination. Mercury is common in fish, and because many of the fish used in sushi are large predators at the top of the marine

food chain, they can have high concentrations of mercury.

Tuna is particularly problematic.⁴ Some experts say adults should avoid eating more than 6 ounces of tuna sushi per week to make sure they don't consume too much mercury. And pregnant women and children should eat even less.

#6: Low-fat yogurt. I have often warned that many of the processed foods labeled as "low-fat" contain extra sugar to make them taste better. And studies are showing this added sugar—not naturally occurring fat—is the real culprit behind many chronic diseases.

You are better off with a real, full-fat yogurt. Real yogurt is made from milk, which we all know is a good source of calcium and vitamins A and D. It also contains beneficial bacteria (probiotics) that digest the sugar found in milk and thus naturally lower yogurt's sugar content.

#7: Trail mix. We have now reached the end of the unhealthy food trail. Which seems appropriate because trail mix, while supposedly nutritious, may be the sneakiest snack of all.

A basic trail mix made solely of dried fruits and nuts is a good, healthy snack. Nuts and fruits eaten in moderation are natural, high-nutrient foods. In fact, they form a basis of the "Bear Diet," which I recommend for healthy weight loss and weight maintenance. (See the special report "Top of the Food Chain Diet" for more.*)

But prepackaged trail mixes typically contain lots of "tasty" ingredients like milk chocolate candies, sugar-coated nuts, yogurt-covered raisins, corn syrup, and fried banana chips. These ingredients are packed with refined sugars, and can boost the calorie content of a trail


mix to a whopping 44 calories *per tablespoon*. That's more than 700 calories per cup!⁶

This caloric load can also include a hefty amount of trans-fats, which should be completely banned from any diet (and are finally being banned by the FDA over the next couple of years).

The alternative is to make your own trail mix with nuts and dried berries from your health food store. Not only will you save a lot of money and calories, but you'll also have a very nutritious snack that you can eat anywhere, whether you're waiting in traffic or scaling the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Why nuts and berries? Nuts are high in vitamins and minerals and are associated with a lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, cancer, gallstones, and obesity. Berries have been linked to a lower risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and urinary tract infections. They also boost immune function.

And if that weren't impressive enough, nuts and berries together are an antioxidant and immune-system powerhouse. The combo also shows benefits for brain and nerve function. A growing number of clinical studies demonstrate that moderate consumption of berries and nuts improves cognitive performance. The dynamic duo may also delay, or even reverse, the effects of age-related dementia.

The truth is, eating healthy doesn't have to be a guessing game. A little common sense goes a long way. And when in doubt, you can't go wrong by always opting for whole, natural foods over processed, prepackaged products—no matter how sneakily nutritious they may seem. 

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