



# Advice can be manageable

By Doug Kouma  
Senior Editor

In the beginning, you buttered your toast, and it was good.

But you switched to margarine, because "they" told you to. Then came lower-fat margarine, followed by fat-free. "They" told you to switch again and again, because fat was bad.

Before long, word came of trans-fatty acids in fat-free foods, which some said were worse than saturated fat, itself.

And "they" said, "Have you considered switching to butter?"

These days, health and nutrition advice seems to come from all corners. With the amount of nutrition information doubling every 18 months, sifting through the studies can be a difficult task, said Karen Miller, the registered dietician and nutrition educator at Campus Recreation and the University Health Center.

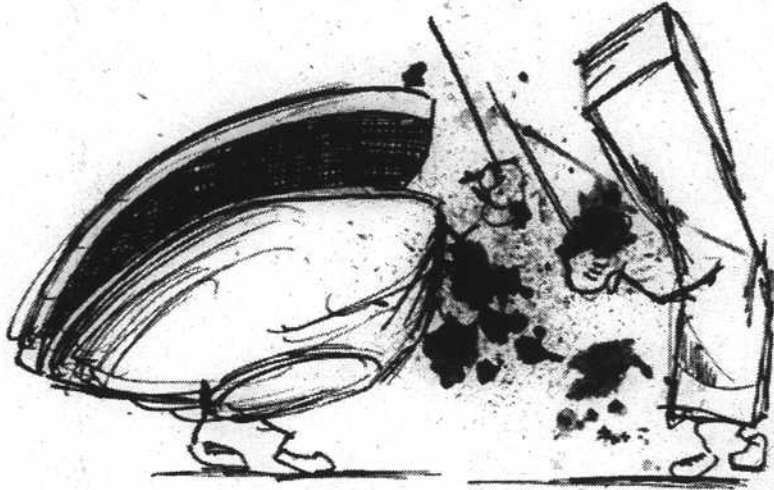
"The popular press likes to pick up on the things that are the most sensational, and they aren't always very discriminating on the research it came from," she said.

Miller said looking behind the results of any given study was important.

"Usually when I see a big study, and it doesn't seem logical, I try to go back and find the original research."

Charlotte Burke, a dietician at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, said looking at the study's parameters was important.

"There is a lot of information coming out," she said, "and the consumer needs to be educated, at least to a



Jim Mehsling/DN

degree, so that when they're reading an article they can use some fairly sound judgement to determine what's appropriate and not appropriate."

Burke said some things to look for included who did the study, how large it was and where the information came from.

Miller said the size of the study was especially important.

"Did they do this study on two people or 3,000 people? It makes a huge difference," she said.

Both dieticians said the best way to maneuver through the sea of new health information was to take each study with a grain of salt and stick to the basics when it comes to nutrition.

Miller said, "The basic information hasn't changed."

A basic healthy diet, she said, consists of a variety of foods — including at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day — and total fat calories of less than 30 percent.

To stay within that limit on fat, Miller said, women generally can eat

40 to 45 grams of fat per day, and men can go as high as 70.

And, Miller said, eating healthy doesn't always mean doing away with high-fat, high-calorie foods.

"If you're counting fat grams, and you want to go to McDonald's and have a Big Mac, well, you can have that. But then you know that the rest of the day you have to be careful what you are taking in. You've got a fat budget."

Burke said the amount of fat grams could generally be kept track of by reading nutrition labels on food.

"The whole business of nutrition really gets down to eating a variety of foods in moderation and maintaining an appropriate weight," she said.

Miller said handouts dealing with a variety of topics were available at the health center.

"There is a lot of information out there," Miller said. "My best advice is to find the original research and see if it makes sense, or find a professional that can help you sort through it."

# Debate over vitamin supplements leaves students with questions

By Erin Schulte  
Staff Reporter

To take or not to take? That is the question.

Not enough vitamins can result in low energy levels, poor night vision and bleeding gums. But getting too many vitamins can be toxic or result in symptoms similar to those of vitamin deficiency, plus discoloration of the skin.

Advice on whether to take vitamin supplements varies widely, depending on whom you ask. Some insist vitamins are unnecessary; others recommend megadoses to insure proper nutrition.

Relying on foods for the body's vitamin needs is the best way to stay healthy, said Claudia Pankoke, a registered dietitian with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Department of Health.

"I don't recommend that people buy supplements. But people like to — it makes them feel better, like they're doing something extra for their health," Pankoke said. "If they insist on a vitamin, I would recommend an inexpensive, generic multivitamin. They're just as good as the expensive vitamins."

Karen Miller, the registered dietician and nutrition educator at Campus Recreation and the University Health Center, said it would be a good idea for most college students to take a multi-

vitamin supplement.

"In theory, if you eat a well-balanced diet, you don't need vitamins," Miller said. "But how many college students do you know who eat right?"

She said it was hard to overdose on water-soluble vitamins, which are released from the body in sweat and urine, but fat soluble vitamins are more likely to be toxic.

A debate has been waging the last few years about whether "megavitamins," which may offer eight to ten times the daily recommended dosage, are helpful or harmful.

Miller recommended supplements that do not exceed 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance.

However, Debbie Wyrick, manager of the Golden Carrot at 70th and O streets, said megavitamins have higher dosages because FDA levels may be set too low.

"It's a raging debate among scientists. FDA levels were set many years

ago for people that were considered basically healthy, not taking into account differing needs," Wyrick said. "No manufacturer makes vitamins with unsafe levels of vitamins."

While some supplements, such as multivitamins and calcium, are consistently purchased, others have gained popularity just recently.

Chromium piccolinate, a trace mineral that regulates blood sugar, has been a big seller among dieters. Wyrick said college-aged women had come in requesting the supplement, which costs about \$5 for 100 pills.

Chromium is supposed to help the body retain lean muscle tissue while dieting. It could also help curb sugar cravings, Wyrick said.

Nearly 80 percent of the population has deficiencies in chromium, Wyrick said, so the supplement is not just for dieters. Chromium is found in whole grains and nuts, and most people eat white bread and flour pasta that do not contain the mineral.

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