

# NewScientist

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## Nothing is forever

Not even the laws of nature

## Fuels gold

Empty promises of the biofuel revolution

SPECIAL REPORT

## Search for the perfect diet

Eat your way to a healthy body  
Foods to make you smart



# THE GOOD THE FAD AND THE UNHEALTHY

The road to the perfectly balanced diet is littered with discarded trends and mixed messages. So where does the truth lie? New Scientist brings you an in-depth look at the facts, and explodes a few myths along the way. By Bijal Trivedi

**YOU** know how it is. You watch your diet. You try to eat the right stuff, in the right amounts. You keep an eye on the latest news about diet and health. It's tough enough at the best of times, yet for some reason the advice seems to keep on changing, so you end up not knowing whether you are doing the right thing or eating yourself into an early grave.

Take dietary fibre. You could be forgiven for thinking that eating lots of fibre is a good idea: according to almost every piece of official advice, it helps prevent colon cancer. Yet last year a large study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that you might as well not bother.

And it's not just fibre. In the past few months the supposedly rock-solid benefits of eating a low-fat diet have been called into question by one of the biggest nutritional studies ever conducted. Another study debunked the benefits of oily fish. Add to that the endless flip-flopping over particular foods and nutrients – carbs, fats, eggs, nuts –

and it's no wonder we're all finding it so hard to know what to eat.

Why is it so difficult to nail down what constitutes a healthy diet? Why, despite hundreds of studies over many decades, do we still not have a sure-fire recipe for good health? The answer, it turns out, is that when it comes to humans and food, getting rock-solid answers is like squeezing juice from a kumquat.

The idea that your diet can improve your health is an ancient one. The mantra "you are what you eat" may have a modern ring but it comes from Ayurvedic medicine more than 5000 years old. Around 400 BC the Greek physician Hippocrates made the link explicit when he wrote, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food."

In the west, the relationship between diet and health has come under decades of intense scientific investigation. As a result it is now possible to say with some certainty that most of the orthodox advice – eating less fat, salt and sugar and more whole grains, fruit and





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