

## 'Eight hours' sleep! And you must eat breakfast!' The truth behind 10 of the biggest health beliefs

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. In pairs or groups, discuss the questions about health and fitness.

1. What do you think of when you hear the terms *bodybuilders*, *power-walkers* or *athletes*?
2. What do you know about the medical conditions, diabetes and dementia? Can anything be done to avoid them?
3. Have you heard of *intermittent fasting*? What does it mean? Is it healthy?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the meanings to the words from the text. The words are in the order they appear in the article.

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. a gland in the male reproductive system   | ___ fibres         |
| 2. an activity that involves watching something to study it                        | ___ overeating     |
| 3. an amount of food   | ___ premature      |
| 4. confused  | ___ cardiovascular |
| 5. connected   | ___ participants   |
| 6. eating too much food  | ___ associated     |
| 7. neither small nor large, light nor heavy, etc.                                  | ___ servings       |
| 8. not doing something, usually harmful, e.g., not drinking                        | ___ abstinence     |
| 9. not processed i.e., fresh   | ___ observational  |
| 10. relating to the heart and blood vessels  | ___ moderate       |
| 11. relating to fat from animal food such as meat or milk                          | ___ predisposed    |
| 12. something that happens too early or earlier than expected                      | ___ torsos         |
| 13. the middle section of the human body, as described without head, arms, or legs | ___ midsection     |
| 14. the part of the human body between the chest and waist                         | ___ trigger        |
|  | ___ conserve       |

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- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| 15. the people who take part in an activity, such as a survey or game              | ___ saturated   |
| 16. thread-like structures in the human body, particularly those that form muscles | ___ prostate    |
|  | ___ confounded  |
| 17. to be more likely to have a medical condition                                  | ___ unprocessed |
| 18. to keep and maintain   | ___ intake      |
| 19. to start something   |                 |
| 20. what you put into your body i.e., food   |                 |

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#### ***Should we really be aiming to walk 10,000 steps a day, or drink two litres of water?***

Joel Snape

4 January, 2023

Here are some widely held dietary and health-based beliefs and what science says now – so you can start making informed health decisions this year.

#### **1 'Lifting weights will give you big muscles'**

This obviously isn't true. To understand the science, though, you have to realise that there are two main ways to get strong: increasing the size of individual muscle fibres or coaxing more of them into firing at the same time.

Bodybuilders aim to do the first, by doing many repetitions in each set of exercises, lifting until their muscles fail. Athletes, who generally have smaller shoulders than bodybuilders, aim to do the second, by lifting heavier weights for fewer reps, and avoiding muscular failure.

#### **2 'Breakfast is the most important meal of the day'**

This is a tricky one. Although there is nothing about the first meal of the day that makes it especially magical, the timing of meals is increasingly recognised as an important factor in weight loss. One study found that those who ate a large breakfast saw greater weight loss than another group who had a low-calorie breakfast and larger dinner.

"This might be because skipping breakfast leads to increased hunger levels later in the day, resulting in people overeating," says Brady Holmer, a researcher in nutrition.

#### **3 'You should walk 10,000 steps a day'**

This number wasn't based on any science when it was first used in the 1960s, but it might be good advice. A study released in 2022 found that walking may reduce the risk of premature death from cardiovascular disease and cancer. Another study found similar results for dementia, with as little as 3,800 steps a day proving effective. But it's also worth stepping up the pace, as the dementia study saw a power-walker's pace showing benefits above and beyond the number of steps walked.

#### **4 'You need eight hours of sleep'**

It's easy to think of sleep as an individual thing: some people need eight hours, while others can get by on seven. But in one of the largest ever sleep studies, launched in 2017, participants who reported sleeping seven to eight hours performed better cognitively than those who slept more or less than that, regardless of age. Those who slept four hours or less performed as if they were almost nine years older.

#### **5 'You should aim to eat five portions of fruit and veg a day'**

"Many studies have found that roughly this number is associated with improved health, but there is also evidence that up to 10 servings per day of these foods can be beneficial," says Holmer. In general, those who consume more fruits and vegetables have lower risks for cognitive decline and dementia, and diabetes, and may even experience decreased levels of stress.

#### **6 'You need to drink two litres of water a day'**

Staying hydrated is important, but the recommendation to drink two litres of water a day, while reasonable advice, is not based on hard science. In 1974, a book by leading US nutritionist Dr Frederick J Stare stated: "How much water each day? For the average adult, somewhere around six to eight glasses, and this can be in the form of coffee, tea, milk, soft drinks, beer, etc. Fruits and vegetables are also good sources of water." The bit about getting your hydration from lattes, celery or Fanta often gets lost – which is a shame because it's still valid.

#### **7 'A daily glass of wine is better than abstinence'**

Sorry, plonk-lovers: this one is a classic of the "correlation is not causation" genre. The old recommendation to have a glass each night is based on observational evidence that people who classify themselves as "moderate drinkers" (roughly 1-2 units a day) seem to have a lower risk for some diseases. However, recent research suggests that regular, small-scale drinking is far from ideal: one study found that even one or two drinks a day might decrease the chance of healthy ageing and reduce the size of your brain.

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That said, there are well-known health benefits that come from a lively social life – so if you are drinking the occasional pint with friends, it might be doing you more good than harm.

#### 8 'Abdominal exercises will give you a six-pack'

"It makes a sort of sense that if you want to build your abs, you would do typical ab exercises like crunches and sit-ups," says Emma Storey-Gordon, a personal trainer and sports scientist. "But the truth is that whether you have visible abs or not has far more to do with your body fat levels and where you are predisposed to store fat than the number of sit-ups you do." Many resources will tell you that you need to be around the 10-15 per cent body fat range to start seeing the outline of your abs if you're male, or 15-20 per cent if you're female. In reality, it's a bit more complicated. "A lot of women need to go below a healthy body fat range for abs; those with longer torsos, who don't store fat around their midsection, may not."

#### 9 'Dieting will slow your metabolism'

It's a common trope that eating a very low-calorie diet, or even fasting, will trigger "starvation mode", where the body slows metabolism as a way to keep you from losing any more weight. "While there's no such thing as 'starvation mode', there may be small changes to someone's metabolic rate when they lose weight or go on a diet," says Holmer. "It's called adaptive thermogenesis – a process during which the body reduces its production of heat in order to conserve energy." This might explain why some people have a hard time keeping weight off, or even regain weight after dieting. To lessen the chances of your metabolism slowing down due to dieting or weight loss, you should avoid rapid weight loss: gradual is better.

#### 10 'Red meat is bad for you'

Red meat was often advised against because it contains a lot of saturated fat – but it's not as simple as that. Several studies have shown an association between a higher intake of red meat and an increased risk of prostate cancer and heart disease, but it is now widely believed that the associations between red meat and disease risk might be confounded, because many studies don't distinguish between processed (bacon, sausages, burgers and deli meats) and unprocessed red meat intake.

"Several recent studies have found that eating unprocessed red meat may not actually increase the risk for heart disease or cancer," says Holmer. "And major health organisations have recommended that people can continue to eat unprocessed red meat."

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Lifting weights in different ways will give you a different body shape.
2. To stay healthy, it's important that you don't skip meals.
3. Walking faster is more important than walking a certain amount of steps.
4. Four hours sleep per night makes you perform as if you were younger.
5. Eating more fruits and vegetables increases stress levels.
6. You can also get your water intake from food and other drinks.
7. Even if you are a "moderate" alcohol consumer, it is likely to be unhealthy in some way.
8. Crunches and sit-ups will give you a six-pack.
9. "Starvation mode" is a way to burn fat faster.
10. The type of red meat you eat will affect how healthy or unhealthy it is.

b. Reread the 10 health beliefs in the article. According to the writer, are these myths or is there any truth to them? Discuss with a classmate.

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### 4 Key language

- a. Try to complete the tables below with the different word forms from the article. An example has been done for you.

|  |                              |                         |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>restricting or limiting the foods you eat in order to be healthier (Noun)</i>             | <b>Gerund</b>                | <b>Adjective</b>        |
| diet   | <i>dieting</i>               | <i>dietary</i>          |
| <i>Relating to the muscles around your stomach (Adjective)</i>                               | <b>Abbreviated Adjective</b> | <b>Abbreviated Noun</b> |
| abdominal  | 1)                           | 2)                      |
| <i>how old you are (Noun)</i>  | <b>Gerund</b>                |                         |
| age  | 3)                           |                         |
| <i>The unit of energy used to describe how nutritional different foods are (Noun)</i>        | <b>Compound Noun</b>         |                         |
| calorie  | 4)                           |                         |
| <i>relating to the mental process of knowing, learning and understanding (Adjective)</i>     | <b>Adverb</b>                |                         |
| cognitive  | 5)                           |                         |
| <i>the act of absorbing water (Noun)</i>   | <b>Adjective</b>             |                         |
| hydration  | 6)                           |                         |
| <i>the process in which the foods and drinks you consume change to energy (Noun)</i>         | <b>Adjective</b>             |                         |
| metabolism   | 7)                           |                         |
| <i>tissue in the body that allow you to move (Noun)</i>                                      | <b>Adjective</b>             |                         |
| muscle   | 8)                           |                         |
| <i>the branch of science that deal with how different foods help you stay healthy (Noun)</i> | <b>Noun - Person</b>         |                         |
| nutrition  | 9)                           |                         |
| <i>doing something, e.g., an exercise, over and over again (Noun)</i>                        | <b>Abbreviation</b>          |                         |
| repetitions  | 10)                          |                         |

- b. Check your ideas by finding the words in the article. Correct any words you wrote incorrectly.

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### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss the following statements.

- "Eating healthy is more important than doing exercise."
- "You can get your diets and exercise plans from Youtube channels."
- "An apple a day keeps the doctor away."

### 6 In your own words

a. Choose one of the 10 health beliefs featured in the article that you disagree with. Write a short essay, expressing why you disagree with the information in the article. Add your own conclusion. You may wish to do research online to add evidence to your essay.