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IS TEATOXING THE ANSWER?

We asked medical experts from across the country about seven of the most hyped-up health trends, to help you separate myth from miracle

BY ALEXANDRA KIMBALL

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THE HYPE

Teatoxes are the best detoxes.

Juice fasts are so 2014. The latest way to cleanse is the teatox, which supplements a low-calorie diet with large amounts of herbal tea, made with ingredients such as valerian root, cinnamon and milk thistle. Proponents say teatoxing improves energy and promotes weight loss.

But is it true?

Tea is a broad beverage category, and includes those made from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* shrub (both green and black teas come from this plant), as well as any number of dried herbs and fruit. While both green and black teas have been shown to reduce the risk of diabetes, and antioxidants in green tea may reduce your cancer risk, there is little research about the health benefits of the herbs in your average teatox blend. Teatoxing might cause weight loss because the prescribed teas include senna, a laxative that works by irritating the bowels, says Dr. Esther Konigsberg, medical director for Integrative Medicine Consultants in Toronto. That can cause diarrhea and may lead to dehydration and malnutrition— not a sustainable (or pleasant) way to lose weight. "There's no strong evidence for detoxing," Konigsberg says. "Your body detoxes all the time, especially if you're exercising and drinking enough water."

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

GUM STAYS IN YOUR STOMACH FOR SEVEN YEARS

"The image of gum stuck in our intestines is one most of us remember being warned about as kids, but it's not true," says Dr. Sheila Wijayasinghe, a family physician at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. "Gum, like any other food, exits your system in about three days."

STARING AT AN ECLIPSE CAUSES BLINDNESS

"The light of an eclipse can damage your eyes by causing a condition called solar retinopathy," says Dr. Daiva Lenauskas, a family physician in Toronto. "However, warnings of total blindness are likely overstated."

CRACKING YOUR KNUCKLES CAUSES ARTHRITIS

"The pop you hear when you crack your knuckles is caused by bubbles bursting in the synovial fluid, which helps lubricate our joints," Lenauskas says. A 2011 study showed that regular knuckle crackers don't have higher rates of osteoarthritis.

THE HYPE

Your body could be too acidic.

Of all the things you'd expect to find in a supermodel's purse, urine-testing strips probably aren't among them. When Elle Macpherson revealed to reporters in April that she carries a pH-testing kit everywhere she goes, she gave fresh traction to the idea (long popular in the natural-health community) that you can stave off illness by keeping your body alkaline rather than acidic. In addition to regularly testing the pH of her urine, Macpherson adheres to a low-pH diet.

But is it true?

"Our blood does not go alkaline or acidic unless we're extremely ill," Konigsberg says. However, because most whole foods, like vegetables and grains, are usually alkaline, eating more of them can be beneficial for your overall health. "People may feel better after adopting an alkaline diet," Konigsberg says. "But the reason isn't the pH of the foods—it's that these foods are richer in nutrients and are less processed."

THE HYPE

Coconut oil makes scars disappear.

Forget pricey designer skin creams: Hollywood's beauty treatment du jour—coconut oil—can be found in the supermarket for $5 a jar. Emma Stone uses it to remove the day's makeup, Kourtney Kardashian applies it as a body lotion and Channing Tatum rubbed it on his wife's baby bump to reduce her stretch marks. Beauty bloggers praise its ability to reduce scars.

But is it true?

Because coconut oil is, well, oily, it does have moisturizing properties, says Dr. Diane Wong, a cosmetic physician in Toronto. "But not everyone's skin reacts the same to coconut oil," she cautions. "It doesn't provide enough moisture for very dry skin and can cause clogged pores for those who have very oily skin." The healing properties of coconut oil for stretch marks and scars are not backed by studies, she adds, citing a long list of DIY scar remedies—vitamin E, aloe vera, cucumber paste, gooseberry (or alma) paste, honey and baking soda, and tea tree oil—that came (and went) before it. "The idea behind coconut oil for scars is that it helps stimulate cellular turnover and builds collagen for faster

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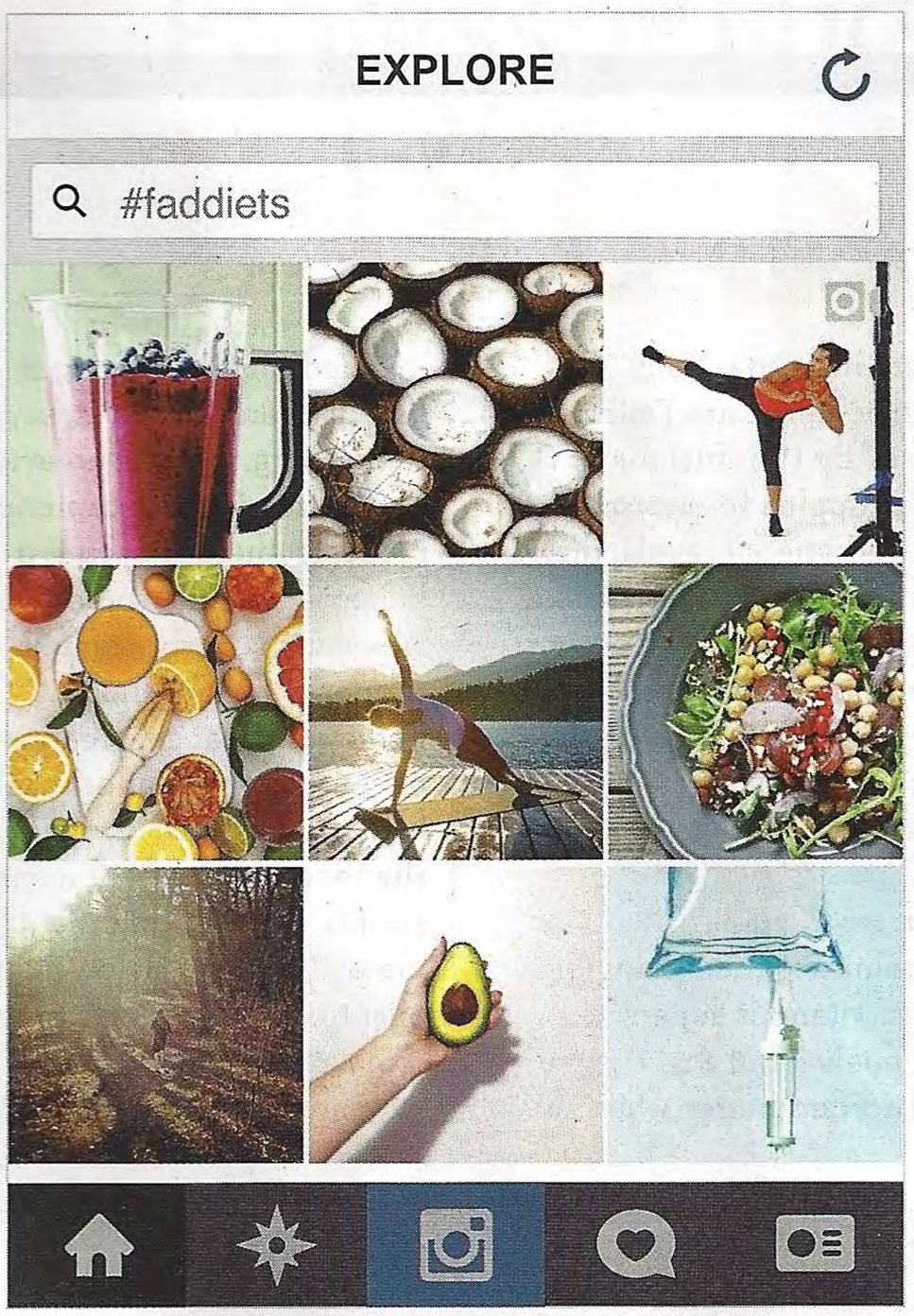
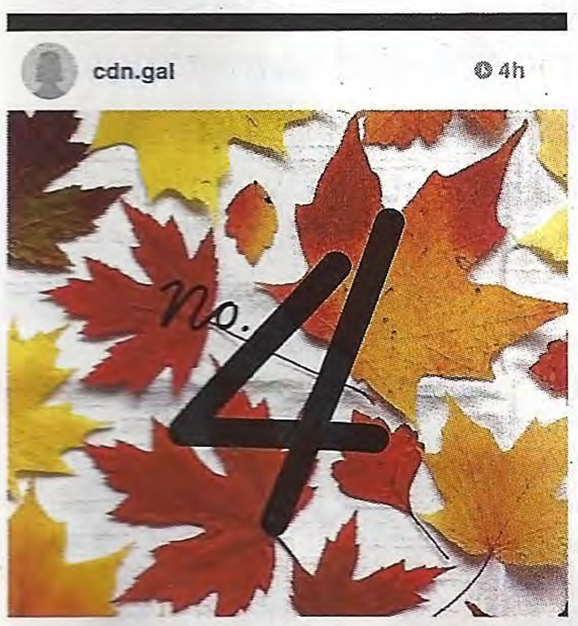


healing," says Wong. "But there's no research to prove or disprove this." Still, there's no harm trying it out, she says, as long as the area you apply it to is healed and not infected.



THE HYPE

Drinking maple water is good for your bones.

Forget coconut water: the newest wellness waters come from trees. Birch and maple waters—which are lower in sugar than coconut water—are quickly becoming today's health elixirs of choice. Fans claim that the natural minerals found in tree waters can help control blood sugar, reduce inflammation and improve the health of your bones.

But is it true?

"Maple water does contain antioxidants, manganese and potassium," says Konigsberg. "As a quick electrolyte balancer that doesn't come with extra calories, it might actually be better than sports drinks, which are high in sugar." But while tree water is fine for a rehydrating boost, she says, the minerals in it aren't present in significant enough quantities to have any real impact on your health.

WE USE ONLY 10 PERCENT OF OUR BRAINS

We use 100 percent of our brains, says Dr. Naguib Mechawar, an associate psychiatry professor at McGill University in Montreal. Modern imaging studies show that all our brain cells are active.

YOU LOSE MOST OF YOUR BODY HEAT THROUGH YOUR HEAD

"Heat loss depends on surface area, and the head accounts for 7 to 9 percent of your body," says Lenauskas. "You'll lose heat from any part of your body that is exposed to the cold."

BREAKFAST BOOSTS METABOLISM

"There is no clear evidence that breakfast can significantly affect your metabolism," says Lenauskas. "But people who eat it tend to eat a healthier overall diet and be more in control about food choices throughout the day."

THE HYPE

Bone broth is worth standing in line for.

People are lining up in New York and Vancouver for a steaming cup of…$10 bone broth (possibly because Gwyneth added it to her warming winter detox). How is bone broth different from chicken stock, you ask? Stock cooks for two to four hours at high heat, whereas bones (chicken, beef, lamb, you name it) are simmered for at least 12 hours to make broth. The Paleo-friendly soup is said to improve immune function and help fix everything from arthritis to cellulite.

But is it true?

While a 2000 study from the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha found that chicken broth may help treat upper respiratory infections, there is no evidence to suggest that bone broth can do anything more spectacular, no matter how long you simmer the bones. "Bone broth contains a variety of important nutrients—such as calcium, magnesium, chondroitin, glucosamine and arginine—that come from the marrow," says Konigsberg. "Although broth can be part of a healthy diet, on its own it's not going to work magic." >

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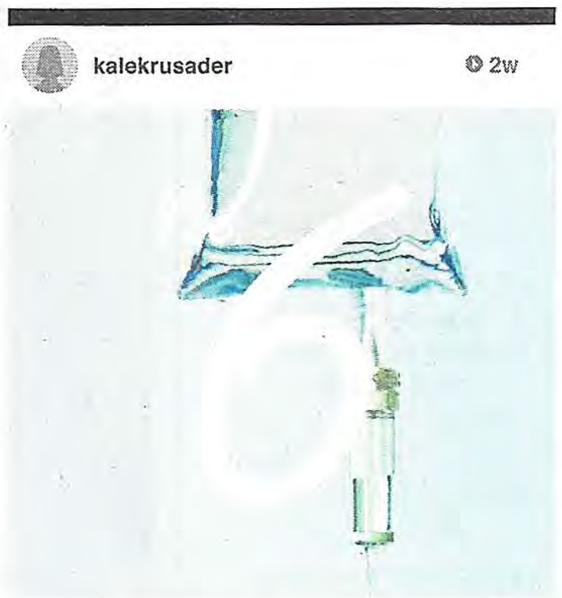
EATING BANANAS KEEPS MOSQUITOES AWAY

"There are mixed reports about whether or not eating bananas deters mosquitoes," Lenauskas says. What we do know is that rubbing the inside of a banana peel on a mosquito bite can stop the itching.



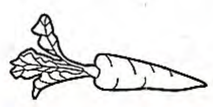
THE HYPE

Injecting vitamins is even better than eating them.

A-listers Rihanna, Kelly Osbourne and Cara Delevingne all swear by IV infusions of B and C vitamins to improve mood and energy levels, prevent disease and get smoother skin. Las Vegas company Hangover Heaven now provides IV vitamin drips on buses to help partiers recover from the previous night's revelry.

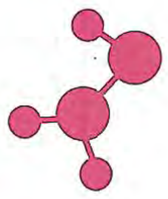
But is it true?

The premise is that taking high doses of vitamins supersizes their benefits and that they're also absorbed better when injected directly into your bloodstream. However, says Konigsberg, there is no evidence that extra vitamins can improve mood or energy (or cure a hangover). While some people who can't absorb vitamins properly, such as those undergoing cancer treatments, might feel better after receiving high-dose injections of vitamin C, she recommends that most people skip the treatment. It's pricey (about $150 for 45 minutes of sitting with a needle in your arm), and because B and C vitamins are water-soluble, your >



EATING CARROTS CAN IMPROVE YOUR EYESIGHT

"Carrots are high in vitamin A, a nutrient essential for good vision," says Lenauskas. But vitamin A won't cure conditions such as astigmatism or glaucoma.



SHOULD YOU TRUST SCIENCE?

In 2008, a survey by watchdog website HealthNewsReview found that more than 62 percent of 500 health stories published by large newspapers during the previous two years were seriously flawed. Those stories overstated the benefits of certain treatments, understated the harms of others and exaggerated the prevalence of diseases. Sometimes, the articles were simply based on bad science and sometimes on a misinterpretation of good science. In such cases, it's left up to the reader to separate fact from fiction. These four questions will help.

DRINKING WARM MILK BEFORE BED HELPS YOU SLEEP

"Milk does contain tryptophan, a sleep-inducing amino acid, but not enough to trigger sleep," says Wijayasinghe. "What likely causes sleepiness is the comforting effect of having a glass of milk, which triggers relaxation."

Who did the study?

"Many organizations produce in-house 'studies' or reports that look like official scientific research," says Julie Gunlock, author of *From Cupcakes to Chemicals: How the culture of Alarmism Makes Us Afraid of Everything and How to Fight Back.* "But these publications are meant to further the organization's goals." When reading about a study, pay attention to who conducted it, where it was published and what the bias might be.

Were rats involved?

Animal research, often done to test medications, doesn't tell us much about the effect on humans. "Typically, rats are injected or fed a much larger dose of a substance than any human would ever be exposed to," says Gunlock. "Rats also differ from humans in that they have a short lifespan and are disposed to developing tumours."

What was the dose?

"The old adage, 'The dose makes the poison' is important to remember when considering scary headlines about toxins," says Gunlock. Research that claims damaging effects from certain chemicals or substances might apply only to doses that are much higher than what we actually ingest.

How was it worded?

"Correlation and association are warning words," says Gunlock. Just because there's a link between two things doesn't mean that one caused the other. "Correlations are easy to find, but they mean very little when trying to find the actual causes of illnesses and disorders," Gunlock says. Words you *want* to see in a reputable report are *randomized, placebo controlled* and *double-blind study.*

PHOTO, ISTOCKPHOTO.

body can only store so much—most of those extra vitamins just wind up in the toilet.

THE HYPE

Oil cleans your teeth better than toothpaste.

The ancient Ayurvedic practice of "oil pulling"—swishing oil (usually sesame) in your mouth at regular intervals to clean your mouth and teeth—has had a recent resurgence in the health blogosphere. Some claim that oil pulling is superior to brushing with toothpaste when it comes to preventing plaque and gum disease.

But is it true?

"Swishing any liquid in your mouth for 10 to 20 minutes will provide some level of mechanical cleaning that will reduce the bacteria in your mouth," says Benoit Soucy, director of clinical and scientific affairs for the Canadian Dental Association. Additionally, mixing oil with the saliva in your mouth can create a saponification (or soap-making) reaction that is better than rinsing with water alone. However, Soucy says, there's no scientific evidence to back oil pulling as an oral-hygiene practice—and plenty of evidence that brushing with toothpaste works. "Oils don't contain fluoride and so can't provide the cavity protection offered by fluoride toothpaste. Plus, brushing and flossing are less demanding practices that are easier to stick to in the long-term."

A SPOONFUL OF PEANUT BUTTER CURES THE HICCUPS

"There is no proven method to get rid of hiccups," says Lenauskas. "The most simple thing you can do is to relax, take deep breaths and, if they persist for long periods of time, see your doctor."

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