



Why is Nutrition SO Confusing.?

By Gemma Hurditch for **CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine).**

High fat, low fat, lots of whole grains, no grains - the contradictions can be a recipe for extreme confusion. Why are there so many conflicting dietary approaches for health and weight loss?

Research

One of the issues raised is who funds nutrition research. Do they have something to gain from a particular outcome? When funded by industry, some research may favour the desired company outcome, such as finding that something is not harmful to us after all!

Even with independent research, other problems can crop up. For example, we were told that saturated fat was harmful to us, so is it ethical to feed a subject group high amounts of it in order to see whether it really is?

Repeating the findings is another hurdle. Most of the research that we rely on is not as rigorously tested as we may think. It may be based on hypothesis from animal studies, small samples, or on observational studies. Observational studies are where researchers observe populations, document what they eat and the conditions they are susceptible to throughout life, and then make the assumption that the associations are causal.



The hypothesis may not have been checked, or only have been tested for a short time, yet the assumed link is perpetuated indefinitely. We were told that red wine saved French people from heart disease, now it's thought it could be the cheese.

Can research ever be correct, if it's also conflicting? Yes, in essence.

Nutrigenomics

Clues as to why some people do incredibly well on a particular diet while others feel tired and lethargic have begun to be uncovered by 'nutrigenomics', the study of how nutrients interact with our genes. It looks at the effect of certain nutrients on our individual gene expression, and how our genes determine our eating behaviour; whether we metabolise certain food chemicals quickly or slowly; if certain pathways of detoxification are compromised, and so on. The science is still in its infancy, but the evidence is 100% clear that our diet influences changes in our gene, protein and metabolite expression throughout our lifetime, starting with our conception and foetal development.

Whilst as human beings we share a very similar genetic makeup, we are all subject to 'snips'. These are single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) and they refer to common genetic variations amongst the population. Different 'snips' can result in extreme variability in how we respond to certain foods. Understanding these variables can help explain some of the inconsistencies among previous studies that have linked nutrients, supplements, and other bioactives (such as caffeine) to health outcomes. It can also help inform us how to best address our very individual requirements in regards to diet and supplements.

Ancient wisdom

In summary, there is no 'one size fits all' diet or supplement regime to deliver excellent health. We are unique individuals with unique responses, a principle long-held by practitioners of the naturopathic approach to health. CNM's Diploma in Naturopathic Nutrition is based on this principle, and combines up to date nutritional research with traditional skills. Students are taught to assess a client's constitution by paying attention to physical signs and symptoms. They observe the body's response using traditional methods such as rotation and elimination diets, and utilise appropriate testing. They then tailor-make an entirely personalised plan to help clients achieve their individual health, weight and wellness goals.

It looks like the sea of scientific information is only now starting to catch up to the ancient wisdom that 'what is food to one is to others bitter poison'.



Gemma Hurditch

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31st August at 7pm.

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Plus save the date for CNM Bristol Open Day: 30th September.