

... AUGUST 2010 ...

## QUICK TAKES

### MEDICAL INFORMATION

When it comes to medical information, you can't always believe what you hear or read. Here are some tips to ensure you are getting reliable health information on the Internet:

- Reliable health-related sites should make it easy for you to find out who's responsible for the site's content and who funds the site.
- Look for current information. Dependable websites are reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
- Government agencies, non-profit health foundations and associations, and medical colleges are among the most trustworthy sources.
- Be wary of sites that sell health-promoting products. If a product sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.
- Your online wellness program offers a searchable database of trustworthy health information.



## Be Smart About Your Health Care

In today's society, health care is a product. And when shopping for any product, you want to get the best value for your money. Take these steps to make sure you're receiving the best care without spending more than you need to:

### Use your doctor wisely!

Even though your doctor is the one with the medical training and expertise, only you can give accurate information about your body, your symptoms and health habits. To get quality treatment, you have to do more than just show up for your appointment. You need to take an active role in maximizing your health. Here are some tips on how to get the most value from a visit to the doctor:

- **Speak openly with your doctor:** Don't wait until you are asked. Be ready to describe all your symptoms and your medical history. Sometimes this may mean sharing personal information; be completely open with your doctor, even if it makes you uncomfortable.
- **Be prepared:** Make a list of things you need to ask or tell your doctor before your appointment. If possible, bring other information such as X-rays, test results and medical records.
- **Get your screenings:** Make sure your doctor schedules you for screenings that are appropriate for you.

### Do your own research

Sometimes it helps to look for information on your own. Learning more about a condition you have, or that you may be at risk for, may help you take steps to prevent it. Just make sure that you rely on sources that are backed by science and up-to-date — particularly when using the Internet. If you have questions about something you read or heard, ask your doctor.

### Be smart about medications

Making good decisions about the drugs you buy and how you take them is a key part of being a smart health care consumer. Here are some guidelines:

- **Buy generics:** Most drugs have both a generic brand and a name-brand version. The difference? Just the name and the price! The FDA strictly regulates generic drugs so they are just as safe and just as effective as brand-name drugs. But they can save you from 30 percent to 60 percent.
- **Use mail-order pharmacies:** If you use a medication over a long period of time, ordering prescription drugs by mail can save you between 10 percent and 15 percent of what you normally pay. Plan ahead, though, as the mail can take some time.
- **Follow the instructions:** 30 percent to 50 percent of those who take over-the-counter drugs do not use them as directed. When taking any drugs, follow the instructions carefully. Never take medicine for longer or in a higher dosage than suggested on the bottle — this can be very dangerous. If you feel the prescribed dose is not effective, see your doctor right away.

# Debunking Health Myths

Some are silly, some are serious, all are wildly overstated at best.

**Silly Myth:** *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.*

**Reality:** Apples aren't miracle cures, but there really are lots of good reasons to eat one or more a day. Apples contain boron, a trace mineral that increases calcium absorption, which may help prevent osteoporosis. They also have soluble fiber, which can help lower cholesterol.

**Serious Myth:** *Cancer is America's No. 1 killer.*

**Reality:** More Americans die of heart disease than from cancer. The good news is that heart trouble, even more than cancer, can often be avoided with lifestyle changes. Cut back on red meat, quit smoking, exercise regularly and maintain an appropriate weight for your height, and you'll significantly reduce your risks.

**Silly Myth:** *Don't swallow chewing gum; it sticks to your stomach.*

**Reality:** Gum is not digestible, but it does not linger in the stomach. For adults, the effects of swallowing gum have not been studied; it's not high on any list of scientific concern. However, one report raised concern that some small children who suffered blockages in the intestines and esophagus frequently swallowed gum. Consult your pediatrician to decide if and when it's appropriate to let your child chew it.

**Serious Myth:** *To get the benefits from antioxidants, you need to take supplements.*

**Reality:** Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables of various colors and you'll get plenty of antioxidants. Bright red strawberries, green asparagus and yellow peppers all deliver loads of them, and they're tastier than supplements of vitamins C and E.

**Silly Myth:** *Reading in dim light — or sitting too close to the TV — will ruin your eyesight.*

**Reality:** While they both may make your eyes feel tired, permanent damage is not being caused. Your eyes include muscles, and like any muscle, overuse can cause fatigue. Doing either of these behaviors may make your eyes feel tired by straining the muscles, but permanent damage is not being caused.



**Serious Myth:** *I can greatly improve my diet just by cutting out red meat.*

**Reality:** Not so fast. A "junk-food" diet without red meat is still junk. If you switch from burgers every night to pizza every night, you're just changing the source of your saturated fat from meat to dairy. The best way to improve your diet is to eat more fruits and vegetables and favor lean proteins such as fish and chicken breast. If you eat red meat, choose leaner cuts.

**Silly Myth:** *Eating certain special foods will boost your metabolism and burn fat.*

**Reality:** There are no magical fat-burning foods. Neither a crateful of grapefruit nor a gallon of cabbage soup will turn you into a more efficient fat burner. To lose excess pounds, you need to decrease your caloric intake and increase the calories you burn through physical activity.

- Source: Inverness Medical

## Vegetable Gumbo Makes 12 servings

It's no myth that eating a wide assortment of fruits and vegetables is good for your health. People who eat greater amounts of fruits and vegetables have a lower risk of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and some cancers.

### Ingredients

2 teaspoons olive oil  
1 Vidalia or other sweet onion, chopped  
3 ribs celery, tough strings peeled, sliced  
2-3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 14.5-ounce can diced no-salt-added tomatoes with juices  
4 cups fresh or frozen corn kernels  
3 cups fresh or frozen sliced okra  
2 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cubed  
4 cups (32 ounces) low-sodium vegetable broth (optional)  
Salt and freshly-ground black pepper to taste  
Hot sauce to taste

### Preparation

1. Heat oil in a large pot over low heat. Add onions and celery, cover and cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 15 seconds.
2. Stir in tomatoes, corn, okra and potatoes. Add broth plus 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer. Cook until potatoes are soft and gumbo has thickened, about 30 minutes.
3. Season to taste with salt, pepper and hot sauce.

### Make ahead tip:

The gumbo may be prepared in advance and stored in the refrigerator for up to three days or in the freezer for one month.



### Nutritional info

per serving  
82 calories  
1 g fat  
.3 g saturated fat  
3 g protein  
19 g carbohydrate  
3.4g fiber  
110 mg sodium