

# What's your diet IQ?

How much do you really know about the food on your plate? Louise Pyne puts your nutritional know-how to the test

Eating is one of life's greatest pleasures, but these days we're bombarded with ever-conflicting information about the food we eat. Women spend on average up to 44 minutes per day debating their dietary choices, which adds up to two years over a lifetime! So we *do* pay attention, but do we make the right choices?

Making smart food choices can transform you into a happy and healthy person. It can keep your mind sharp, your mood stable and minimise the risk of illness. But how much do you really know about the pros and cons of the ingredients on your plate? Test your nutritional know-how with our diet quiz.





## TEST YOUR NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Take our quick nutrition quiz then read on to see how you scored

### 1 WHICH OF THESE FRUITS IS BEST TO BUY ORGANIC?

- A Apples
- B Pineapple
- C Bananas
- D Mangos

### 2 WHAT'S THE BEST DIET FOR OPTIMUM HEALTH?

- A Low fat
- B Low carb
- C Low GL
- D Sugar free

### 3 WHICH OIL IS NOT SUITABLE FOR COOKING?

- A Avocado oil
- B Coconut oil
- C Butter
- D Olive oil

### 4 WHAT IS THE ORAC SCALE?

- A A measure of correct portion sizes
- B A new Hollywood diet craze
- C A hierarchy of food in order of antioxidant content
- D A high-tech set of bathroom scales that measures overall body composition

### 5 TO IMPROVE SKIN HEALTH, CONSUME MORE...

- A Carrots
- B Milk
- C Wholewheat crackers
- D Prawns

### 6 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING FOODS HAS BEEN SHOWN TO HELP LOWER CHOLESTEROL?

- A Cumin
- B Parsley
- C Garlic
- D Chilli

### 7 WHICH OF THESE IS CONSIDERED THE BEST SUGAR SUBSTITUTE?

- A Agave syrup
- B Xylitol
- C Molasses
- D Honey

### 8 OUT OF THE TREATS BELOW, WHICH IS THE BEST FOR YOU?

- A Red wine
- B Dark chocolate
- C Coffee
- D Cheese

## The answers

### 1: The best fruit to buy organic is apples

Eating organic transforms the nutritional properties contained in everyday fare from average to amazing, with research indicating that organic food is usually fresher and often contains more antioxidants than conventional produce. 'Antioxidants help neutralise harmful chemicals that damage tissues and may contribute to the development of chronic disease such as heart disease,' says nutritionist Maria Zaretti (revital.co.uk). But there is a downside. Switching your supermarket shop to organic-only comes with a hefty price tag, so if you can't afford to go all-out organic you need to pick and choose wisely. The Environmental Working Group, a certified non-profit health organisation, provides a list of the foods that should always be purchased in their organic form. And top of its 2012 list? The humble apple. Tests found that apples tend to contain the most pesticide residue of all fruits and vegetables. 'Choosing organic apples means you can eat apples with their skins while avoiding any problems related to pesticide residues,' adds Maria.

### 2: Low-GL diets rule

Low-GL diets are considered the best for their overall nutritional value. GL stands for glycaemic load and is based on the effect carbohydrate content in food has on blood glucose levels. 'The GL looks at both the quality of the sugar – how fast it releases – and the quantity. Some foods release glucose into the body faster than others, causing blood sugar spikes that can lead to weight gain. GL eating helps balance blood sugar so that you lose weight and keep it off,' says Maria.

What about the other diets? Most low-fat foods replace fat with sugar, while many sugar-free sweeteners are packed with chemicals that are difficult to metabolise. Eating low-carb food is also a common diet trap. While eliminating carbohydrates may help you lose weight in the short term, it's often not sustainable in the long run. Banning food groups such as carbohydrates completely from your diet means you may miss out on vital nutrients.

### 3: Don't cook with olive oil

Good oils are an important part of any healthy diet, providing the body with essential fats to keep our cells healthy. But not all oils are created equal. Different oils have different smoke points – the temperature at which their

**STAR TIP**  
If you can't afford to buy organic apples, peel the skin to minimise nasties

**STAR TIP**  
Combining complex carbs with protein, such as houmous on oatcakes, lowers a food's GL even further

Make like Bugs Bunny and munch carrots for glowing skin

## 'VIRGIN COCONUT OIL, WITH ITS IMPRESSIVELY HIGH SMOKE POINT, IS THE KING OF ALL OILS'

natural composition changes. Extra virgin olive oil for example, probably one of the most popular cooking oils, is actually one of the most unstable oils and is best used for drizzling over healthy salads.

Raw, virgin coconut oil is the king of all oils. With its high smoke point, it can be used for frying and baking at high temperatures and contains a wealth of health-promoting properties. 'The saturated fatty acids in coconut oil give it a higher smoke point than many other oils which don't have the same fatty acid profile,' says Maria. Butter is a good option and avocado oil (high in heart-friendly monounsaturated fats) can also be heated to a high temperature.

### 5: Fight wrinkles with carrots

Eating the right foods can take years off your looks and keep your skin glowing. Beta-carotene, an antioxidant that's converted from vitamin A, is one of the best nutrients for skin. It's found in bright orange foods such as carrots and plays a role in keeping skin tissue healthy and protecting against harmful UV damage from the sun's rays. 'A 2010 study published in the *Journal Evolution and Human Behaviour* also reported that eating yellow and orange-coloured fruit, and vegetables rich in carotenes, helps give the skin a healthy glow that is rated as more attractive than suntanned skin,' says Maria. Result!

**STAR TIP**  
Munch on some crunchy carrot sticks with guacamole for a skin-boosting snack between meals. You'll get a good dose of vitamin A as well as complexion-enhancing monounsaturated fat from the avocado

### 6: Garlic can lower cholesterol

Chilli, cumin and parsley all contain important nutrients for general good health, but garlic is a superhero when it comes to fighting cholesterol and has been used as a medicinal weapon against heart disease for hundreds of years. The pungent bulb contains a sulphur compound called allicin, which helps to lower LDL cholesterol (the 'bad' type) and improve blood flow to essential organs. 'It seems that garlic helps keep our arteries elastic and this helps maintain a healthy blood flow,' explains Maria. 'Taking garlic orally seems to lessen age-related decreases in aortic elasticity, and high-dose garlic (900mg per day over four years) appears to slow the development of hardening of the arteries.' Try adding crushed garlic to your soups and chillis.

**STAR TIP**  
To make the most of garlic, mince or chop the cloves and leave to stand for a few minutes before cooking to release its heart-friendly compounds

### 7: Xylitol is the new sugar

When it comes to sugar, there are goodies and baddies, but xylitol is considered one of the best substitutes for regular sugar. It's a naturally occurring sugar-free sweetener which looks and tastes like ordinary sugar, minus the calories. Unlike regular sugar, xylitol doesn't require the hormone insulin in order to be metabolised, so it doesn't result in blood sugar spikes. 'Xylitol is naturally

**STAR TIP**  
Include as many colours as possible in your diet. As a general rule, the deeper the colour of fruit and veg, the more antioxidants they contain

found in most plants, including many fruits and vegetables – notably raspberries, strawberries, plums and mushrooms,' explains Maria. 'It has fewer calories than regular sugar (about two calories per gram on average) and this makes it a good choice of low-calorie sweetener. It's also absorbed much more slowly than sugar.' The second best natural sweetener is a good-quality honey, such as manuka honey. It contains antiviral and antibacterial properties, but use it in moderation as it can cause fluctuations in blood glucose levels.

## 'EATING DARK CHOCOLATE EVERY DAY COULD LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE'

What about agave syrup? It's often lauded as a healthy sugar substitute, but recent studies have indicated that agave is high in fructose and places a heavy load on the liver. And worst of all? Artificial sweeteners. These are often packed with chemicals and there is conflicting evidence about their safety, so it's best to avoid them altogether, if you can.

**STAR TIP**  
Use Xylitol for baking rather than sugar

### 8: Dark chocolate makes for a healthy treat

Dark chocolate, with a minimum of 70 per cent pure cocoa solids, helps to keep your heart and brain healthy. It's packed with antioxidants, vitamins and minerals including magnesium, potassium and iron, and also helps to regulate your blood sugar levels when eaten in moderation. 'Studies show that eating 6.3g of dark chocolate a day, providing 30mg of cocoa polyphenols, could lower blood pressure,' says Maria. 'Cocoa flavonols in dark chocolate have beneficial cardiovascular effects, in part due to their antioxidant and magnesium properties.' Red wine contains resveratrol, which can help keep your heart healthy, but a new Spanish study found the alcohol negates the antioxidant benefits. Coffee has also been shown to have cancer-preventative powers, but too much can mess with blood sugar.

Cheese is a source of calcium, but it can have inflammatory effects and inflammation has been linked to many illnesses, from Alzheimer's to cancer. So, choc is your best bet! 🍫

**STAR TIP**  
For an extra hit of antioxidants opt for raw dark chocolate varieties



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM