Nutrition: Fact vs. Fiction

It has never been easy to sort through the facts and fallacies about food. Marketing ploys, clever phrases, pseudo-science, media hype and celebrity testimonials don't help. Here are some common food myths:

Myth: Fresh fruits and vegetables are healthier than frozen or canned.
Fact: Research shows frozen and canned foods are as nutritious as fresh. In fact, since lycopene is more easily absorbed in the body after it has been processed, canned tomatoes, corn and carrots are sometimes better nutrition choices.

Myth: Body weight is a reliable indicator of a healthful diet.
Fact: No two people have the same body composition. The measure of a person's diet and your overall health is a combination of factors, including weight.

Myth: Eating carbohydrates causes weight gain.
Fact: Calories cause weight gain. Excess carbohydrates are no more fattening than calories from any source. Despite the claims of low-carb diet books, a high-carbohydrate diet does not promote fat storage by enhancing insulin resistance.

Myth: Eating just before bedtime is fattening.
Fact: What you eat, not when, makes the difference; calories have the same effect on the body no matter when they are consumed. Evidence does suggest that eating regular meals, especially breakfast, helps promote weight loss by reducing fat intake and minimizing impulsive snacking.

Myth: Eating sugar causes diabetes.
Fact: Diabetes is caused by a lack of insulin in the body. Since foods that are high in sugar are often high in calories, over eating those foods can lead to weight gain. Research shows people who are overweight and obese are at increased risk for diabetes.

Myth: Occasionally following a fad diet is a safe way to quickly lose weight.
Fact: Many fad diets are developed by people with no science or health background so some fad diets can even be considered harmful to people with certain health problems.

When trying to lose weight, attend a PHEW programme or see www.hse.ie/nutritioninfo for more information.