Americans Confused: What Foods Are "Good for You"?

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Are eggs good or bad for you? Are all fats bad? Most Americans know that what they eat affects their health -- but many are confused by a succession of new and often contradictory diet study findings.

Keywords


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CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

Transcript
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TOM BROKAW, anchor:
So what does it take to eat healthy? More of tonight's LIFELINE from NBC's chief science correspondent, Robert Bazell.

ROBERT BAZELL reporting:
When Debbie Rego, a research psychologist, buys food for her family, she feels like many of us do. Ms. DEBBIE REGO: I think there's an immense amount of confusion about what's good and what's bad. BAZELL: In fact, the latest survey from the American Dietetic Association shows that almost four in five Americans believe that nutrition affects their health, but only two in five think they are doing all they can to eat the right diet. One problem, the seemingly endless barrage of new and often contradictory findings. Dr. JEANNE GOLDBERG (Tufts University): Nutrition is not a science of breakthroughs. The story goes together very slowly, in little bits and pieces. BAZELL: Take fat, like butter and margarine. The old advice: avoid all fats at all costs. Many nutritionists now think that was a big mistake. Dr. GOLDBERG: We threw out the baby with the bathwater there. BAZELL: It turns out not all fats are the same. Scientists now believe vegetable oils can be healthy, that animal fats generally are not, but the worst of all is trans-fat, chemically altered vegetable fat found in many margarines and processed foods. Scientists are now changing the advice about other tasty things, too, like salt and eggs. Dr. WALTER WILLETT (Harvard School of Public Health): For many years dietary advice was based really on guesses. BAZELL: The new studies show the guesses were often wrong. Salt does not usually raise blood pressure, and eggs do not raise cholesterol. But the biggest problem is not what we eat but how much we eat. Whether it is good for you or bad for you, Americans are eating more of everything, creating an
epidemic of obesity.

Government figures show that in this century, the average person's intake of red meat, poultry, fish, cheese, fats and sweeteners have all gone up.

Dr. GOLDBERG: That's where we've gone off the deep end in terms of excess consumption.

BAZELL: And that is the unhealthy reality, no matter what the latest nutrition study finds.