

Title:

You Say "Tomato, "I Say "Deadly Poison"

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Summary:

Legend has it that a hardy Colonel named Robert Gibbon Johnson, tired of his superstitious and uninformed countrymen's refusal to touch or eat tomatoes, sat in front of the Salem, New Jersey Courthouse with a basket full of the little red fruits. To the shock, horror, and eventual awe of the 2,000 person crowd, he consumed every last tomato without dropping dead.

Of course this isn't true, nor are any other claims of American leeriness of tomato consumption. But there are ...

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Article Body:

Legend has it that a hardy Colonel named Robert Gibbon Johnson, tired of his superstitious and uninformed countrymen's refusal to touch or eat tomatoes, sat in front of the Salem, New Jersey Courthouse with a basket full of the little red fruits. To the shock, horror, and eventual awe of the 2,000 person crowd, he consumed every last tomato without dropping dead.

Of course this isn't true, nor are any other claims of American leeriness of tomato consumption. But there are plenty of foods we don't eat because we think they're bad for us when in reality they're not. Let's take a trip down memory lane and look at some misunderstood foods!

The Egg: harbinger of doom?

The humble egg, a baking and dietary staple nearly everywhere on earth, has hit its share of rough times. Though it's an incredible source of protein and choline, an egg's yolk also contains a large amount of cholesterol—cholesterol which was thought to be utterly terrible for the body. However, there's endless dissent, with some researchers claiming that an egg's cholesterol actually lowers "bad" cholesterol and raises "good" cholesterol, with other scientists claiming the opposite. Combine this hotly-contested nutritional value with the salmonella scare (how many times did mom tell you not to eat cookie dough?) and

you get one woeful reputation for such a delicious and useful food.

Sure, you shouldn't pig out on eggs every day, but by using them properly you can enjoy the taste—and the protein—without having to resort to egg whites in a carton!

Some good egg recipes include:

Scrambled Eggs in Baby Brioches with Smoked Salmon and Asparagus
Eggs Sardou
Egg Puff-Muffins
Old-Fashioned Egg Noodles

Coffee: those jitters are just the caffeine.

You remember the turning point. Suddenly health experts everywhere started talking about the perils of coffee and the dangers of caffeine. Gloomily, coffee drinkers everywhere switched to decaf or learned to get more sleep at night (God forbid). But while too much coffee is certainly bad for your health (go here to see some alternatives), drinking a moderate amount actually helps with more than your fatigue!

Coffee is rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and other important nutritional components. Drinking three to five cups daily, researchers say, can lower the risk of Alzheimer's, kidney stones, Parkinson's, depression, and suicide. And to think, it keeps you awake, too!

Chocolate: well, maybe...

The bane of overindulgent foodies and fat kids everywhere, our favorite sweet has caught a bad rap, but is it fully deserved? The jury's still out on this one, because while studies have shown chocolate has a positive effect on HDL cholesterol and plenty of antioxidants, it's still, well, chocolate. Just like red wine, chocolate can offer some nice health benefits, but make sure you moderate intake. A few ounces per week ought to do it!

Try some of these chocolate recipes:

Chocolate Chestnut Mousse
Easy Chocolate Truffles
Chocolate Brownies
German Chocolate Martini

But of course, while we've certainly got some much-maligned foods given an

unfair rap by the public, there are other foods. Wolves in sheep's clothing, if you will. These started out "healthy," but eager consumers got more than they bargained for. It's fascinating, watching the tide turn from public approval to public shun. First on the list and perhaps most infamous is...

Margarine: healthier than butter! We think.

Margarine first appeared on the scene in 1870, when Emperor Louis Napoleon III offered a reward to any man who could devise a substitute for butter. Louis himself wouldn't be eating this, of course; it was meant for feeding soldiers and the poor. A Provencal man named Hippolyte Mège-Mouriez invented the first margarine, it since then the spread-based on an emulsification of natural oils in water-has proliferated and developed all around the world.

Proponents of margarine pointed out its lower saturated fat content and fewer calories than butter, and many an American child remembers his mother buying margarine to make healthier chow. Of course, there was an unforeseen downside to the partial hydrogenation process used to make margarine: trans fats. Unlike saturated and unsaturated fats, which at least hold some nutritional value, trans fats are completely devoid of anything remotely resembling health benefits. They are literally worthless, and it was only relatively recently that margarine cleaned up its image and dropped the trans fats. Same goes for margarine's harder, whiter cousin, shortening.

Coca-Cola: cures what ails you! Including proper body mass.

Though it's now criticized as a sweet indulgence riddled with unhealthy ingredients, Coke started out as a cure-all. When it first hit the market in 1885, its creator John S. Pemberton marketed the bubbly drink as a cure-all health tonic utilizing the "properties of the wonderful Coca plant and the famous Cola nuts."

Yep, coca plant, as in the source of cocaine. At one time the company's secret recipe actually contained several milligrams of the drug, which was eventually dropped in favor of non-narcotic coca leaves. To this day, Coca-Cola is the only company allowed to import coca leaves into the United States. Fortunately, people quickly realized that while Coke was delicious, it wasn't exactly healthy. Of course, we still drink it by the millions of gallons, but at least we don't think it's good for us.

Olestra: finally, fatty taste and no [major] consequences!

Consumer goods megacompany Proctor and Gamble's invention Olestra, originally

developed to help premature babies absorb fat, quickly showed a more commercially viable use. Its fat molecules are so huge and its compounds are so active that it passes unabsorbed through the digestive tract. Think of the implications: endless savory snacks, all tasting great but completely fat-free!

Unfortunately, the stuff turned out to have some deeply unpleasant side-effects, including the infamous "anal leakage" which Proctor and Gamble fought desperately to downplay. Olestra chips (including brands like Fritos WOW) remain on the market today, but are quickly vanishing from shelves, and it ain't because we're buying them.

So, dear readers, what have we learned? Simple: next time someone claims a food is all bad or all good, don't take that claim at face value. Just imagine: what if someone claimed broccoli made your hair fall out?