

ask the doc

BY LIZ LIPSKI, PH.D., C.C.N.

what's up with effervescent vitamin C, the midnight munchies, copper for bones, habitual eating—and what the heck is boba?

Q: *I am a creature of habit. I like to eat basically the same meals every day. My diet consists of fruits, veggies, lean protein, good fats and good carbs, but is it okay to consume the same foods on a daily basis?*

A: Even though you're eating lots of fresh, natural foods, it's still essential to vary your diet, because the nutrients in broccoli aren't the same as those in green beans, just as strawberries' aren't equal to bananas'. Nutritionists have been telling us for decades to eat a variety of fresh foods. The wider the variety, the more likely you are to get trace nutrients and phytonutrients that could easily be missing from a limited diet.

Years ago we naturally varied our eating patterns throughout the seasons, depending on which crops farmers were harvesting, weather permitting. But thanks to agricultural technology, today we have asparagus—a food found only for a month in spring—all year 'round. We can purchase apples, pears, peaches and berries every day of the year if we want to.

If you're not the imaginative type, try these suggestions: Order different veg-



gies on your pizza. Whip up an exotic fruit in your shake. Venture into unexplored territory at the salad bar. Buy a new variety of whole-grain bread at the market. Be bold, and get healthier.

Q: *These little packets of vitamin C in every health food store: Can you really get your daily requirement just by mixing them with water and drinking it?*

A: Yes—and then some. The recommended dietary intake (RDI) for vitamin C is 75–90 mg. for adults. A powdered supplement like EmergenC

provides 1,000 mg. per packet. Although this is well above the daily requirement, the RDI was set merely to prevent deficiency diseases, not for optimal health. Personally, I take 2,000 mg. daily since it's a challenge to get sufficient C by diet alone. Solid research shows that megadoses of C help protect us from colds, flu and viral infections such as herpes.

Q: *I've heard that including copper in my diet might improve my bone health. If so, how much do I need and how do I get it into my eating plan?*

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A: Copper is essential for proper bone metabolism. The RDI for women is .9 mg. But if you take this mineral in supplement form, you must balance it with at least 8 mg. of zinc for healthy immune function. You can more easily accomplish this by taking a daily multi-vitamin with minerals.

Good food sources of copper include shellfish, nuts, beans, liver, bran and the germ of grains. Moderate sources include most meats, mushrooms, tomatoes, dried fruits, bananas, potatoes and grapes.

Q. For several nights in a row every few weeks, I find myself getting up at 2 or 3 a.m., dying for something to eat, especially sweets. An apple or popcorn won't suffice; I'll actually eat a whole bag of cookies. I am ravenous when this happens, even though I've eaten adequately during the day. What's going on?

A: You have what's called night-eating syndrome (NES). NES is more common in women than men and affects 1 to 3 percent of the population. I've heard that most people reach for fatty, carbohydrate-laden foods like doughnuts or leftover pasta, but my clinical experience has been different. Most women confess to me that they crave sugar. They'll consume multiple candy bars, dozens of cookies, even pints of peach brandy to get that sugar fix. The impulse is so strong that, to satisfy their cravings, some will actually drive to the convenience store in the wee hours to buy sugary snacks.

Typically I see this in my clients when their hormones shift during ovulation, premenstrually, during menstruation

or perimenopause. At these times, drops in blood sugar are common. It's why we can eat sensibly for three weeks of the month and then completely lose control for one. If our blood sugar is low, many of us wake up and reach for the sweetest, fastest food we can find to raise glucose levels.

To head off your cookie monsters, eat a sustaining bedtime snack, especially when you are premenstrual.

Think of it as a mini-meal of about 200 to 250 calories. It needs to be enough food to sustain you for eight hours and should contain protein and carbs. Have crackers with cheese, leftover chicken with rice, a handful of almonds and a banana or cottage cheese. Select foods that slide down easily—a banana, pear, half-cup

of cottage cheese or cranberry juice—so you won't fully wake yourself up to eat.

To better ensure that your levels remain stable, take a glucose-supportive nutritional supplement with 200–800 mg. of chromium and at least 5 mg. of manganese. When choosing a supplement, look for additional ingredients such as vanadium, magnesium and B-complex vitamins. These nutrients enable us to go longer without getting tired and shaky between meals and will help prevent us from waking up at night seeking chocolate bars.

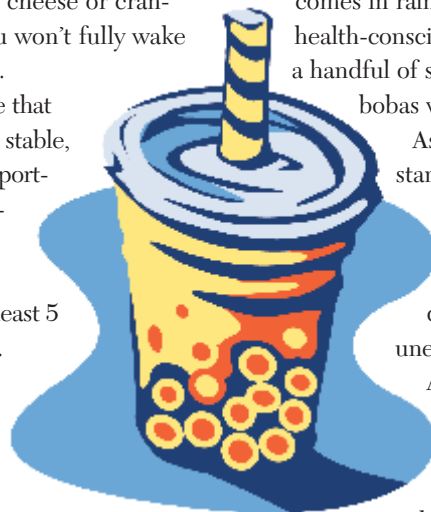
If your cravings persist, consult with your doctor. Nighttime eating can be a sign that you are under stress or that your hormone levels are imbalanced.

Q. What are boba drinks? I see a lot of Asian-themed stores touting cool, creamy drinks with rubbery balls at the bottom. What are they, and are they nutritious?

A: Boba is an Asian tea-based beverage sold at stands that are popping up all over the country. Also known as bubble tea, pearl milk tea or tapioca tea, this icy refreshment debuted in Taiwan in 1985.

A typical boba is made in a blender with milk, coconut milk or nondairy creamer, tea and sugar. Its distinctive feature is the addition of pearl-size chewy balls of cooked, black tapioca the consistency of gummy candy, which are to be sucked up through a wide straw. The milkshake-like concoction is made to order with powders or syrups in flavors such as green tea, mango, Thai milk, honeydew, lychee and taro, and comes in rainbow of colors. Due to health-conscious customer demands, a handful of store owners now flavor bobas with fresh fruit.

As for nutritional value, a standard eight-ounce cup has about 200 mostly empty calories. The tapioca is about as devoid of content as unenriched white flour. Additional syrups used contain artificial colors and flavors. If you wish to indulge, do so only on occasion.



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