

Where to Eat

THE ONLY BANGKOK RESTAURANT GUIDE TO TELL IT HOW IT REALLY IS

IMAGE asia

[Home](#) | [Print Version](#) | [Advertise](#) | [About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Links](#)
[What's New?](#) | [Holes in the Wall](#) | [Features](#) | [Favourite Dish](#) | [Dining Bargains](#) | [Maps](#) | [Symbols](#) | [Directory](#)
[Restaurant Listings](#) | [Reviews](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Places to Go](#) | [Services & Suppliers](#) | [Places on the Move](#) | [Recipes](#)
[Where to Eat in Bangkok](#) > [Home](#) > [Restaurant Features](#) > **The Lies We Eat**

Features:

[Dining in Converted Houses](#)
[A Primer on Booze: Rum](#)

From Previous Issues

[Dining on Chao Phraya River](#)
[A Primer on Booze: Tequila](#)

[Bangkok's Best Steaks](#)
[A Primer on Booze: Part 1](#)
[The Energy Food Syndrome](#)
[Gin](#)
[French Food in Bangkok](#)
[Nectar from Spain](#)
[Afternoon Tea](#)
[Lee Café Advertorial](#)
[Australian Wine](#)
[Tasty New Tipples](#)
[Little Bo Peep's Missing Sheep](#)
[Siam City Advertorial](#)
[Wyndham Thai Advertorial](#)
[Castello Banfi Wine Maker](#)
[Salad: It's good for you!](#)
[Business Set Lunches](#)
[Reducing Fusion Confusion](#)
[Sunday Brunch with the Kids](#)
[Sauvignon Blanc](#)
[Best Burgers in Bangkok](#)
[Aphrodisiacs](#)
[Wines of the World](#)
[Vin de Pays from France](#)
[Lies We Eat](#)
[Bakery Bargains](#)
[Siam Winery at Samut Sakorn](#)
[A Dummies' Guide Pizzas](#)
[The Truth About Thai Seafood](#)
[Disposable Restaurants](#)
[Japanese Dining in Bangkok](#)
[Service With a Smile?](#)
[A Handle on Italian Wines](#)

The Lies We Eat

See Also

Maps
[Bangkok](#)

FEATURES

THE LIES WE EAT



We are smart enough to know we will die, but lack the wherewithal to keep it from happening. This disconcerting reality causes us to accept the most ridiculous nonsense in an attempt to avoid the inevitable and the various maladies preceding it. We make jest of Ponce de Leon and his search for the Fountain of Youth, but are any of us really much different? For him it was a magic fountain, for us it is things like Vitamin C, green tea, a Mediterranean diet or herbs from a plateau somewhere in Tibet.

Over the centuries shaman, hucksters, witch doctors, and in recent times, learned professors have fed us a steady diet of claptrap – and we have believed it. You know, things like eat a dried toad, drink a glass of your own urine, or ingest 5000 mg of Vitamin C each day and you will live longer. Then there are the cagey capitalists who make money from all the twaddle: the drug companies, purveyors of herbal remedies and companies selling food. They take the academic findings, distort them to meet their own ends, and put them into Madison Avenue hype everyone can understand. People on the street, eager to avoid the grim reaper, inevitably fall for the distortions and create dozens of new millionaires as a result. This has become a process as regular as the rising and setting of the sun, with the only variable being the length of time required before people realize the latest panacea isn't what it was cracked up to be.

To maintain perspective in this minefield of mendacity, you have to be cynical and never forget selling food is the world's largest and most lucrative business. Remember, the Devil was a down and out nobody until he convinced Eve to eat some of his forbidden fruit.

Ask yourself questions like the following.

- Are the people extolling the virtues of a certain food making money from selling it?
- Why do supposedly unbiased research projects often have results that conflict with each other?
- Why do trade associations consistently see healthful benefits in the food products of their members and problems in the products of competitors?
- Why do university research projects seem to find more health benefits in products

produced in the country where the university is located than similar projects conducted in other countries?

- Why do professors find benefits in the products of companies for which they act as consultants when they conduct 'unbiased' research back in academia?

The answer to all of these questions is invariably money. Selling food is big business and if you can convince the world your product will help people live longer and healthier lives, you are destined to be a multi-millionaire. When it comes to food at least, money is indeed what makes the world go round.

Big Lies We are Fed

For me, the most irritating big lie surrounding food is the 'you are what you eat' myth. It is important to note that this particular bit of gobbledygook is usually promoted by people out to make money by selling a particular food. Their message is 'eat our product and you will be strong and healthy because you are what you eat'. Humbug! The myth ignores the fact different people react to food in

different ways. It doesn't take into account things like age, physical condition, genetic differences, emotional states, other foods eaten and the physical environment in which the food is consumed.

Perhaps the classic example of this big lie is cow's milk. It is good, particularly the low fat variety, for most children of European descent. For the majority of children in the world, however, it is often harmful. For genetic reasons, these children can't tolerate lactose and ingesting more than a cup of milk a day can often lead to stomach problems and diarrhoea. This fact is known to purveyors of dairy products, yet they – and the governments of countries exporting milk products – persist in telling people it is healthy while virtually ignoring the harmful side effects.



Another big lie is that we should eat large amounts of a particular food to promote good health. Poppycock! If you disagree, indulge me for a moment. We all know that eating too much is bad for us. It makes us fat and less immobile, conditions that tend to shorten life spans. Ditto for eating too much of certain items. Everyone seems to agree excessive amounts of cholesterol and saturated fats are bad for us. In fact, eating too much of anything seems unwise. Remember when Linus Pauling, a Noble Laureate in both Chemistry and Peace, argued large amounts of Vitamin C were good for us? Today, virtually all nutritionists agree that we need Vitamin C, but that there are no benefits, and possibly some harm, in consuming large amounts. When I was a child, my mother forced me to eat lots of liver and eggs because 'they are good for you'. Today, we are told that although these items possess important vitamins and minerals, they also contain substances we should consume in limited amounts. The key to a healthy diet is to avoid eating large amounts of anything. Moderation and variety are what is important, not excessive amounts of what someone happens to be selling. So much for the really big whoppers. Let's now take a tour of some of the smaller ones.

Little Lies We are Fed

1. A Mediterranean diet will help you live longer.

For some reason, people blindly accept the assertion that people living around the Mediterranean Sea live longer than other people. This simply isn't true and in many instances people from other countries have longer life expectancies. The Japanese, Swedes and Dutch, for example, soundly trounce the Mediterranean countries in the longevity sweepstakes. Are we about to see a Dutch diet to promote longer life? Goodness, I hope not!

2. Eat your spinach.

It's good for you because it's filled with iron. In reality spinach doesn't contain any more iron than other leafy vegetables. Furthermore, the iron in spinach is difficult for the body to absorb unless it is combined with an acid like lemon juice. Hang your head in shame, Popeye. It wasn't right to have accepted those payoffs from the producers of canned spinach.



3. Olive oil is good for you.

Jumping on the bandwagon is an international pastime and no where is this more evident than in the flap about olive oil. Yes, it is low in saturated fats and it might have some properties that reduce cholesterol and the risk of colon cancer. But it is a fat and loaded with calories. Eat too much of it you will have the health problems connected with looking like a dirigible.

4. Eating yogurt is good for your stomach.



Yogurt is made by inoculating milk with *Streptococcus thermophilus* and *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, two bacterial strains that can't live for more than about fifteen minutes in the stomach. Some yogurt contains *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, a bacteria that aids digestion, as an additive. But it is not used to make yogurt and can be found as an additive in some milks.

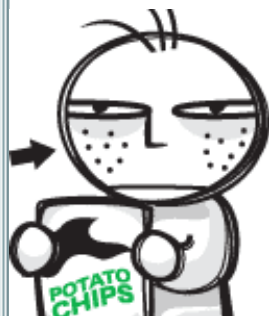


5. Vitamin C helps prevent and cure colds.

In spite of what people want to believe, there doesn't appear to be any truth to this assertion. Our bodies need Vitamin C to function properly, but it doesn't prevent colds.

6. Sugar makes children hyperactive and causes diabetes.

Research has consistently shown that too much sugar isn't what makes the little monsters hyperactive. It has got to be something else. Maybe, it is permissive parents who allow their progeny to gorge themselves on candy. This isn't to say loads of sugar is good for you. It isn't, but it doesn't cause hyperactivity. And while we are on the subject of sugar, it also doesn't cause diabetes. People who are already diabetics, need to control their sugar intake, but eating sugar isn't what caused their problem.



7. Greasy snacks cause pimples.

I can't believe we are now told that grease, chocolate and all those other things I was denied as a teenager don't really cause pimples. Food, it seems, is not the cause of pimples. It's not fair! I was a deprived teenager!

8. Frozen vegetables are less nutritious than fresh ones.

Surprise! It's probably a toss up. Once vegetables are picked they begin to lose their nutritional value. If frozen vegetables are picked and immediately frozen, they are likely to have more nutrients than 'fresh' vegetables that have been sitting around for a long time.



9. You should drink eight glasses of water a day.

Water is the best thirst quencher, but in recent years it has become clear that other liquids – like milk, juice, tea, coffee and soft drinks – also contribute to water requirements. In Bangkok, where much of the water is devoid of minerals because of purifying techniques, it is a good idea to include juices in your daily allotment of liquids.

10. Too much salt causes high blood pressure.

It is amazing how many people accept this as a fact. Salt doesn't cause high blood pressure and heart disease. It is other factors, including some that are genetic. Too much salt is bad for people with heart disease and high blood pressure, but it doesn't cause the problem. People with normal blood pressure don't have to worry about salt causing hypertension.

Hopefully the foregoing has turned you into a cynic. When it comes to eating, cynicism is probably your best weapon. Ignore the hype, the fads, and the hucksters trying to sell you their products; they probably aren't true and in many instances are downright lies. You aren't going to live forever, and I am sorry to report, there is no Fountain of Youth.

Remember not to eat too much and to make sure your diet includes a variety of different foodstuffs. And most important of all, don't forget to enjoy yourself. Bon appetit!



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[Go to Top](#)

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62/10 Soi Prompak, Sukhumvit 49/6 Klongton, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand Tel/Fax +66 (0) 2712 9410
Editorial: +66 (0) 8 4914 0776 / mm@wheretoeat-bangkok.com
Sales: +66 (0) 8 6633 6933 / yu@wheretoeat-bangkok.com
Administration/Accounts: Tel: +66 (0) 7626 4491, Fax: +66 (0) 7626 4454, Email: nit@image-asia.com