

Break through common nutrition myths, see what's trending, catch up on latest research, and get great tips from our team of Registered Dietitians.



Food FAQs

I was told milk causes mucus production. What do you think?

This widely held belief is not supported by scientific evidence. Studies have shown that milk does not increase nasal secretions, coughing or congestion, and does not worsen cold or asthma symptoms. Although milk does not increase phlegm production, it may thicken the saliva, giving the perception of more mucus. Liquids with a comparable texture to milk have also been shown to thicken saliva, providing a similar sensation.

[Milk, Mucus and Cough](#)

[Milk consumption does not lead to mucus production or occurrence of asthma](#)

Margarine is one molecule away from plastic, isn't it?

No it isn't. Many substances share similar chemical properties, but the slightest variation in their chemical structure can make a significant difference. In the same way that adding an oxygen atom to water (H₂O) will not turn it into hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), adding or changing a molecule will not turn margarine into plastic. The confusion may lie in the fact that margarine possesses plasticity; simply put, margarine (like other natural materials such as rubber, clay, and butter) is moldable, and this plastic-like quality was important in the historical development of margarine. Margarine, like butter, is a water-in-fat emulsion made up of fatty acids. However, not all margarine is created equal; be sure to choose soft, spreadable, non-hydrogenated margarine with no trans fat.

[Oils and fats expert burst four anti-margarine myths](#)

I get probiotics in my yogurt. That's full of good bacteria, right?

Not necessarily. To make yogurt, active bacterial cultures (*Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*) are added to pasteurized milk; however, these cultures are not considered probiotics. Probiotics are specific strains of live organisms which, when consumed in adequate amounts, provide a health benefit to the host. The yogurt label will tell you the type and amount of probiotic that has been added. If, however, yogurt is pasteurized after the bacteria have been added, this treatment will destroy most of the bacteria; since commercially-available yogurts can be used as a starter for homemade yogurt, this suggests that they do not undergo a second pasteurization process (although one would need to confirm with each manufacturer to be certain). Whether or not a probiotic will be helpful depends on the probiotic strain, as different strains are used to treat different conditions. Kefir, a fermented, drinkable, yogurt-type beverage, contains more probiotic strains at higher doses, but the strain mixes have not been well-studied.

[Your guide to the yogurt aisle](#)

[The probiotic effects of lactic acid bacteria](#)

I've noticed that when I eat asparagus, my urine has a funny smell. Is that normal?

Yes. Researchers believe that during digestion, the vegetable's sulfurous amino acids break down into smelly chemical components in all people. These components are "volatile," meaning airborne, so the odor wafts upward as the urine leaves the body and can be detected as soon as 15 minutes after eating this spring delicacy. However, only about 25% of the population appears to have the special gene that allows them to smell those compounds. So the issue isn't whether or not you have "asparagus pee," it's whether you're able to smell it.

[Why your pee smells funny after eating asparagus](#)



Apple cider vinegar lowers blood sugar, doesn't it?

Several small trials support apple cider vinegar's blood glucose lowering abilities. Acetic acid, an ingredient found in all vinegars, is the active agent responsible for this anti-glycemic effect. Research suggests that acetic acid reduces disaccharidase activity and enhances glucose uptake by skeletal muscle, similar to Prandase and Metformin. One study examined the effects of apple cider vinegar in people at risk of type 2 diabetes. Consuming 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar at mealtime, twice daily, lowered fasting blood sugar levels greater than daily Metformin or Rosiglitazone (0.89 versus 0.22 and 0.50 mmol/l respectively). In people with type 2 diabetes, acetic acid lowered post-prandial blood glucose levels when added to a high-glycemic index meal, but not to a low-glycemic index meal. Another study found that taking apple cider vinegar before bed lowered fasting blood sugar levels. Apple cider vinegar is generally considered safe when used orally and appropriately in small amounts. However, large amounts may cause hypokalemia (especially when combined with insulin or diuretics), hyperreninemia and osteoporosis. Apple cider vinegar shows promise as a blood glucose lowering agent, however, larger randomized control studies are required to support these findings.

[Vinegar ingestion at mealtime reduced fasting blood glucose concentrations in healthy adults at risk for type 2 diabetes](#)

[Vinegar reduces postprandial hyperglycaemia in patients with type 2 diabetes when added to a high, but not to a low, glycaemic index meal](#)

[Vinegar ingestion at bedtime moderates waking glucose concentrations in adults with well-controlled type 2 diabetes](#)

[Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database](#)

Is chocolate healthy?

There has been much research into the possible health benefits of chocolate; unfortunately, most of this research has been funded by the chocolate industry, and more independent studies are needed to confirm that it can improve health. Cocoa, the key ingredient in chocolate, contains flavanols which are believed to promote heart health. However, flavanol content differs depending on the type of chocolate and how it has been processed. Commercially available chocolate, including dark chocolate and other premium varieties, contains few flavanols. To attain the flavanol content used in some research studies, one would need to eat the equivalent of 12 bars of 100g dark chocolate every day (along with a hefty dose of added fat and sugar). If you choose to include chocolate, enjoy it in small amounts and as part of an overall healthy eating plan.

[The dark truth about chocolate](#)

I've heard that cancer thrives in an acidic environment. Would an alkaline diet help to counter this?

The main belief of this diet is that cancer thrives within an acidic environment and not in an alkaline one. So, people with cancer choose to eat foods that are believed to make the body more alkaline, and avoid foods believed to make the body more acidic. Is there any good evidence supporting this claim? No. Solid tumors actually create an acidic environment, so it is the cancer itself creating the acidic environment within this localized area; however, this does not affect the body's overall blood pH. The blood pH of the body is tightly regulated and our understanding of chemistry and acid-base buffering systems in the body do not support the principles of the alkaline-ash diet. Defining foods as alkaline or acidic is based on research that was conducted in the early 1900's, whereby foods were incinerated and their ash mixed with water. This ash-water mixture's pH was analyzed, and this is what determined foods to be acidic or alkaline. Based on these principles, oranges would be considered alkaline because of their ash, despite the whole fruit itself being acidic. Foods defined as alkaline-ash are: vegetables, low sugar fruit, soybeans, nuts/seeds, and legumes. Foods defined as acidic-ash include: white sugar, whole grains, dairy, egg yolks, meat, ETOH and caffeine. The concern with the alkaline-ash diet is that it creates restrictions on high protein foods. Cancer patients already have higher protein needs, and potentially more nutrition-related side effects from cancer treatment. Individuals following this diet often will assess their urine pH. The challenge with urine pH is that it is a poor reflection of blood pH. While blood pH is carefully maintained around pH 7, urine pH can change based upon food intake. So, different eating patterns can have an influence on urine pH, but consuming alkaline-ash foods has not been shown to alter the blood pH outside of the normal range.

[BC Cancer Agency: FAQ #2 Alkaline Diet](#)

Talk to your Registered Dietitian for more information



Recipe of the Month

Asparagus Cashew Rice Pilaf (All Recipes)

Makes 8 Servings

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup butter
- 2 ounces uncooked spaghetti, broken
- 1/4 cup minced onion
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 1/4 cups uncooked jasmine rice
- 2 1/4 cups vegetable broth (low sodium)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 pound fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 2 inch pieces
- 1/2 cup cashew halves



Instructions

1. Melt butter in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Increase heat to medium, and stir in spaghetti, cooking until coated with the melted butter and lightly browned.
2. Stir onion and garlic into the saucepan, and cook about 2 minutes, until tender. Stir in jasmine rice, and cook about 5 minutes. Pour in vegetable broth. Season mixture with salt and pepper. Bring the mixture to a boil, cover, and cook 20 minutes, until rice is tender and liquid has been absorbed.
3. Place asparagus in a separate medium saucepan with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, and cook until tender but firm.
4. Mix asparagus and cashew halves into the rice mixture, and serve warm.

Tips on How to Choose & Store Asparagus

The meaty flesh and grassy flavor of asparagus spears make for bright, fresh springtime dishes.

Size isn't an indicator of quality or flavor; thick asparagus is just more mature than the thin variety. Instead, look for bright green or violet-tinged spears with firm (not limp) stems. Make sure the tips are closed and compact. When the bunch is squeezed, it should squeak. Avoid stalks that appear woody.

Trim the bottoms and wrap the cut ends in a damp paper towel. Refrigerate in a plastic bag for up to three days. Or treat your spears like fresh flowers: Place the cut ends in a bowl or a vase filled with an inch of water and cover the tops with a plastic bag. Store in the refrigerator.

