J&M® halal certified meals use only wholesome ingredients and have NO MSG, NO SOY, and NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS OR COLORS. Each meal is fully cooked and is conveniently packaged in either 10 oz. (283 g) microwaveable serving dishes or 8 oz. (227 g) travel and camping pouches. Reheat to eat in minutes.

LAMB & LENTIL STEW: Tender lamb joins a medley of tomatoes, lentils, onions, chickpeas, zucchini and red and green sweet peppers. Aromatic herbs and spices invite all to taste and enjoy this truly delicious meal.

LAMB & BARLEY STEW: Tender lamb, combined with barley, eggplant, red and green sweet peppers, zucchini and onions, create a true culinary delight! A scrumptious meal with a variety of textures, it is deliciously seasoned with herbs and spices of the Middle East.

MY KIND OF CHICKEN®: A favorite combination of chunks of light and dark chicken meat with brown rice, peas and carrots in a mild sauce.

CHICKEN MEDITERRANEAN: A hearty chicken meal with the flavors of the Mediterranean region. It has chunks of light and dark chicken meat, tomatoes, potatoes, chickpeas, and black olives in a tangy sauce.

CHICKEN & NOODLES: A winning combination with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, homestyle Kluski noodles, peas and carrots in a lightly seasoned sauce.

CHICKEN & BLACK BEANS: A scrumptious meal with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, black & kidney beans, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet peppers and corn. Simple spicing brings out its full flavor!

BEEF STEW: A satisfying and delicious stew! It has chunks of lean beef, with potatoes, sweet peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, zucchini, chickpeas and carrots in a flavorful sauce.

OLD WORLD STEW: Chunks of lean beef, with brown rice, tomatoes, zucchini and pinto beans. The sauce is seasoned with the aromatic flavors of the Middle East.

PASTA WITH GARDEN VEGETABLES: This delicious and robust meal has rotini pasta with peppers, mushrooms, zucchini and tomatoes. It is perfectly flavored with traditional Italian seasonings.

VEGETARIAN STEW: A meal fit for vegetarian and hearty eater alike! With macaroni, vegetables, potatoes, barley, lentils, peanuts and seasonings, this meal has great taste and a variety of textures.

CHEESE TORTELLINI: Cheese-filled tortellini are simply delicious in a well-seasoned tomato sauce, with the added protein and texture of pinto beans.

FLORENTINE LASAGNA: A meal influenced by the tastes of Florence. Savor the combination of small lasagna noodles in a tomato sauce with Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses, spinach and pinto bean pieces which add texture and protein.
In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

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Editor’s Note

Assalamu Alaikum,

New year, new you? That’s how the saying goes. Many of us, perhaps by tradition, like to resolve that we will be a better version of ourselves in the coming year. And many of us fail, usually because the goals we’ve set forth are too lofty.

Rather than proclaiming to change your life in dramatic ways (e.g., giving up pop altogether, exercising daily, losing 20 pounds), it seems more realistic to take small steps toward a greater end. Some of the articles in this issue might be helpful in getting you to reach that goal of a healthier, happier new you.

I’ve been trying to eat less white flour these days; white flour doesn’t give me the fiber I need in my diet. “Flour Power” is a good start to getting you familiar with the incredible number of other flours that are available. I thought chickpeas were best for hummus; I had no idea you could make flour out of them!

There’s been so much talk about essential oils the past few years and the amazing benefits they can add to your life. If you’ve heard the talk but still don’t know much on the subject, check out “The Power of a Single Drop” for some great info on the wide variety of oils and their best uses.

Certain essential oils can help relieve headaches. But, did you know there are many different kinds of headaches? They aren’t all the same; therefore, treating them is not the same. Find out more about the different types of headaches and what you can do to not only reduce symptoms but keep them from occurring in “Healing Your Headaches.”

A recent trend in the health department is detox waters. You may have seen the recipes floating all over Pinterest. What exactly is detox water? Will it really remove the toxins from my body and make me healthier? Find out if the health benefits are real in “The Deets on Detox Waters.”

One resolution that’s very common is to reduce sugar intake. In “Food For Thought,” find out why there’s more than just willpower at play.

Perhaps you’re what’s considered an older adult and have already been taking care of yourself throughout your life with healthy eating and exercising. Or maybe you’ve reached older adulthood despite poor eating habits and minimal activity and have just now decided to change your ways. Learn about the activities some older adults have been participating in and maybe you’ll take an interest in a few in “Staying Active: A Lifetime of Fitness.”

Discover “The Versatility of Vinegar” as an ingredient in your cooking. Learn about “Thiamine: A Wonder Vitamin.” And don’t forget to try out some of the great recipes.

As always, let us know what you think! Send us an email or connect via Facebook or Twitter. We love to hear from our readers!

Happy Reading!

Sincerely,

Alia Shalabi content manager
From the Publisher’s Desk

Assalamu Alaikum,

As the year 2016 comes to an end and we welcome 2017, let me start by wishing you a Happy New Year! May 2017 bring you peace, security, happiness, and many more halal-certified products.

Now is a good time to reflect on our activities and accomplishments over the past year and to plan for the year ahead. In 2016, we continued our major activities including halal certification services, the Sabeel Food Pantry, the annual Chicago Muslim Turkey Drive, publication and distribution of the Halal Consumer© magazine, and support for local organizations and education. We also established the American Pan-Islamic Community Council to manage events, the Abrahamic Center for Cultural Education to educate the community about Islam and Muslims, and the Sabeel Center as a community center and showcase of the Prophet Muhammad’s (Peace Be Upon Him) life and influence.

The Sabeel Food Pantry continues to support 50 families on a weekly basis as well as others on an as-needed basis. The Pantry welcomes your donations. In 2016, the Chicago Muslim Turkey Drive distributed five thousand turkeys to families in the southern Chicago Public School system. IFANCA matched donations on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

During the year, we also provided a grant to Texas A&M University to establish a Diversity in Food Program to train food science students in halal and other diverse food diets so they are ready to face the industry challenges upon graduation.

Through the American Pan-Islamic Community Council, we organized and managed the 2016 Eid Expo at Navy Pier to provide a space for the community to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr. The feedback was very positive and we plan to continue this in 2017 and beyond.

Sadly, this year we suffered the great loss of two of our founders and close friends, Dr. Ahmad H. Sakr and Br. Allen Hamood. May they enjoy the bounties of Paradise. We look forward to a rewarding 2017 as we continue to expand our offerings and challenge ourselves to do even better and push our programs to the next level. We wish you a blessed year ahead and success in your endeavors!

Sincerely,

Muhammad Munir Chaudry
president

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Oh no! Not another article glorifying gluten, gluten-free, or gluten bashing. Don't worry. This article will not make you feel guilty about eating a few slices of bread. In fact, it will inspire you to add variety and depth to your gastronomical experience.

The “en vogue” fashion statement in the food industry today is utilizing different types of flour. Gone are the days of using regular wheat flours for everything doughy. Today we have several types adorning grocery store shelves. Seeing all the variety, you ask yourself, “But why? Why can’t I just be happy in my gluten-filled world?” Well, there are several reasons to explore beyond white or wheat flour.

One main reason is the onset of gluten allergies. Gluten is the family of proteins most commonly found in wheat, barley, and rye and can trigger allergies in some people. In severe cases, some people can have Celiac disease. This is a genetic autoimmune disease where the consumption of gluten can lead to the damage of the small intestine.

Ok, so obviously that is severe, but why is everyone else hopping on the bandwagon? There are a multitude of reasons. Studies have shown that eliminating gluten from the diet can help individuals who suffer from arthritis, heartburn, migraines, indigestion, asthma, and weight gain. If none of these ailments apply to you (be thankful) then just try these flours to sophisticate your palate and give your taste buds a change of scenery. Plus, you’ll seem really cosmopolitan and worldly at social gatherings.

Is this a new wave phenomenon? Is this a millennial thing? No and no. The use of ground grains and nuts other than wheat has been around for centuries. As a species, humans were quite resourceful when it came to using a wide variety of grains and nuts. In fact, the millet grain has been used for thousands of years as a staple and has been mentioned in the Old Testament. The journals of Marco Polo mention millet because he discovered it in his travels to Asia where he saw the Mongols using it in their cooking. Now if Marco Polo wrote a journal entry regarding this grain, perhaps we need to give it, and others, a try.

So what are some of these magical alternatives to wheat? Here’s a nutritional snapshot of the most popular flours (based on 1/4 cup serving size), via the USDA Food Composition Database:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flour Type</th>
<th>Protein (g)</th>
<th>Carbohydrates (g)</th>
<th>Fiber (g)</th>
<th>Calories (kcal)</th>
<th>Common Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice Flour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>Commonly used as a coating for deep frying, as a thickening agent for soups/stews, and in the base for crepes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garbonzo Bean/Chickpea Flour (Gram Flour)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Commonly used in Indian cooking, known as besan, and used in dumplings, curries, and desserts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almond Flour</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Commonly used in desserts such as cakes, pie crusts, and macaroons, and as a coating for frying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn Flour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Commonly used in breads, cakes, tortillas, and flat breads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconut Flour</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Commonly used in cookies, cakes, and other baked goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckwheat Flour</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Commonly used in pancakes, Japanese soba noodles, and to add a nutty flavor without nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet Flour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Commonly used in breads, cereals, and baked goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato Flour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Commonly used to make pancakes and pastas, as a coating for fried food, and as a thickening agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teff Flour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Commonly used to make injera, a North African flatbread; also adds a nutty flavor to pancakes, waffles, and baked goods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sounds good? Sounds good in theory? Have real people tried it and lived to tell about it? Sure! Huda Quraishi Ahmed of Hoffman Estates, Illinois, has been limiting her gluten intake for a few years now. With this switch, she has been able to alleviate the pain of premature rheumatoid arthritis in her hands. When asked how she deals with not being able to eat regular wheat flour, she says, “The good thing about being desi is that most of the food is gluten-free. I use rice flour as a coating when frying cutlets or as a thickening agent for stews and soups, chickpea flour for pakoras [Indian/Pakistani deep-fried dumplings], and of course rice dishes are all on the list of things I can eat. Biryani being gluten-free is definitely a blessing!”

Dr. Mohammed Fareed of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has recently started a wheat flour alternative lifestyle. His choice to go wheat free was due to his asthma and acid reflux. He was on steroids for asthma when he decided to alter his diet two months ago. Within the first two weeks, he felt more energetic and his breathing and acid reflux improved. Now, two months into his new lifestyle, Dr. Fareed no longer uses immunosuppressants and his other medication dosage has been cut by two-thirds. So what substitutes has he used? “I incorporate more lentils, lentil flours, rice flour into my diet. Dosas are crepes made with lentil and rice flour and are a good substitute for wheat bread.”

What about me? Have I tried any of these flours? All this research intrigued me. I wanted to try a healthier twist to baking. I recently substituted almond flour and ground oats for all-purpose flour when baking chocolate chip cookies. When you add in some pecans and honey to the batter, it is guaranteed to be a crowd pleaser.

Convinced? Inspired? Motivated? Or are you still skeptical? Well think of it this way: a man left Italy, spent 24 years traveling, journeyed 15 thousand miles (without a Fitbit), navigated half the world, and was awed by a grain so much…he decided to write about it in his journal. If Marco can try it, so can you. Happy eating!

HUSNA T. GHANI has an MSEd and an MBA. She has taught health and science for years. When she’s not working, she reads, writes, sketches, and tries to save the world (or something like that).
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The Deets on Detox Water

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Detox Water

By Naazish YarKhan
While no one would suggest we drink the water we rinse our fruits and veggies in, a glass of water with a sprig of mint and a handful of blueberries has a certain cachet, especially when it’s called “Blueberry and Mint Infused Water.” In a similar vein, a jug of water with slices of lemon, lime, and orange is likely to be “Citrus Fusion Detox Water.” Detox waters or infused waters, in recent years, have been much touted as one route to healthy living. The labels, often used synonymously, refer to waters infused with the flavors and essences of various edibles. Add a few berries, cucumber slices, or lemon wedges to your bottle of water and what you’re now sipping is a detox water. There are detox water recipes for clearing acne, preventing bloating, aiding weight loss, and the list goes on.

Claire Tylke, 18, a University of Vermont freshman, has several favorites including mint water, cucumber water, lemon water, and strawberry water. “Sometimes I combine them and have cucumber mint water or others like that,” she says. “There are so many different combinations to try.”

How does she decide what to drink? “It’s mainly based on what’s in the fridge, so it’s very dependent on the season,” she says. “In the summer, I make infused water with more fruits and citrus and then use vegetables and herbs in the winter. If I’m drinking it for a specific purpose, for instance, to gain electrolytes or help with digestion, then I will choose one that has ingredients that help with that particular need.”

What’s Not To Love?

The benefits of drinking water have been well researched. Adding a subtle fruit flavor makes it easier for some to keep hydrated all day. So, what’s not to love? As registered dietitian Shahana Khan of Naperville, Illinois, will tell you, her issue is with the use of the label “detox.”

“When people call a product ‘detox,’ that bothers me. There is no single, consistent definition for a product claiming to be a ‘detox.’”

— Shahana Khan, dietitian

So are detox waters pure urban myth? It would seem so, especially when it comes to detox waters that claim to promote weight loss. “Water should not be considered a meal replacement because foods alone replenish nutrients,” says Khan. “As dietitians, we don’t recommend that people not eat anything and end up drinking just water. That’s not a great way to do it. If you’re really concerned about weight and what you’re eating, add greens, nuts, yogurt, sprouts, cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli and cauliflower, to your diet,” Khan advises. Her approach to weight loss centers on eating only that which adds nutrients to one’s body. Whatever you eat or drink, her mantra is, “You want it to count and be nutritious.”

When it comes to weight loss, El-Amin finds drinking water, whether infused or not, helpful, as thirst is often mistaken for hunger. Drinking more water feeds a feeling of satiety and, therefore, often helps prevent excessive grazing.
Is It Worth It?

While there isn’t much proven benefit in regards to detoxing properties of these waters, El-Amin says they serve as an excellent option to encourage water consumption. “I appreciate that people tend to drink more water when it’s infused. I often recommend using frozen berries as a replacement for ice that will infuse flavor at the same time. I often will add lime, ginger, and mint to my water. This blend helps settle the stomach,” admits El-Amin. “All in all,” she continues, “the main benefit that I see in detox water is simple—it helps you drink more water.”

When Khan adds one to two tablespoons of raw organic apple cider vinegar to an eight-ounce glass of water, the combination waters down (no pun intended) the bitter taste of vinegar. “Apple cider vinegar gives you nutrients and energy. I [drink a glass of apple cider vinegar water] every day, whenever I remember,” says Khan. Vinegar, a food mentioned in the Quran, contains vitamins and plenty of other well-researched health benefits.

Tylke recalls her soccer coach encouraging players to drink lemon water throughout the day on hot game day because citrus replenishes electrolytes. “I decided to try it and found that I really enjoyed it!” she says. “I continued to drink lemon water before my major sporting events because I played in very hot conditions and I don’t drink sports drinks. Because I enjoyed lemon water so much, I looked into other things to infuse my water with, for other health benefits.”

She believes infused water has made a difference in her health by providing added nutrients and antioxidants from something other than her food. “In addition, it tastes so good that I find myself drinking more water in general!” adds Tylke. “Just try it! What have you got to lose?”

NAAZISH YARKHAN is a prolific journalist and communications strategist whose work has been featured in over 50 media outlets including NPR, PRI, and Huffington Post. She works with students across the US as a writing and college essay coach. More at WritersStudio.us.
Healing Your Headaches

By Nadia Malik
After giving birth to her third child, Shereen Hussain started suffering from such debilitating migraines that she was often out of commission for days at a time. The throbbing pain would hit her right behind the eyes or at the base of her skull. The only way to deal with it was to put on a blindfold, get in bed, and wait it out—not the easiest prospect to face every six weeks with three children and a job.

Hussain’s story is hardly unique. Dr. Christopher Oakley, assistant professor for neurology at Johns Hopkins Medicine and director of the Pediatric Headache Center, says chronic migraines—and headaches in general—are a vast problem. Chronic is defined as at least 15 days of symptoms a month for three or more consecutive months.

“There could be several causes for any head pain, including lack of sleep, not enough nutrients, and tension.”

“Headaches, especially in adults, are quoted to be as prevalent as 80 to 90 percent,” he explains. For migraines, “in some studies it’s as many as one in three [adults]. In other studies, it’s somewhere in the mid-teens to mid 20 percent.”

There are several hundred types of headaches, Dr. Oakley says, and they can be classified into three categories. The primary class means there’s no underlying cause and the symptoms come on randomly. The second type identifies a cause, such as stroke, seizure, aneurysm, or other illness or medical issue. The third is a more “other” category, dealing with things like neurological conditions and facial pains.

The primary bucket is where migraines, tension headaches, cluster headaches, and most everyday headaches fall. Migraines are differentiated from your routine aches by throbbing that’s aggravated by basic activities, as well as nausea or sensitivity to light and sound. Tension are the most common—spread across the temple, not localized, with potentially sore muscles—and cluster refer to cycles of throbbing, with indicators such as a runny nose and redness in the eyes.

Of course, many patients who experience severe cases of head pains worry that it’s not common and could be symptoms of something more serious, such as a tumor. But Dr. Oakley says doctors would be able to identify any red flags and if there are no extreme circumstances or family history that show up on a routine work-up, the issue is likely something a specialist could help with.

Hussain tried several remedies after the first onslaught of agony, including Eastern homeopathic drugs that out-of-country relatives and friends brought when they visited her. Nothing made a huge difference. After several years, she decided to take medication, something she had been avoiding. “I finally broke down one day,” she remembers.

“It was like a dream come true; [my headaches] went away immediately.”

She took the medicine for a year until a doctor warned her that the side effects could be frightening, including increasing the possibility of a stroke. Dr. Oakley agrees that chronic patients have to weigh the cost and benefit of using stronger drugs. For some, it’s the only solution. Hussain felt that her body was becoming immune to the pills anyway since she was having to take more and more to get relief. Still hoping to find another way, and with her sister-in-law, a fellow sufferer, seeing a naprapath, who concentrates on a holistic approach focusing on connective tissues, Hussain explored the idea of alternative therapies.

“I think that it really did work,” she reflects. “[The headaches] really, really decreased.”

Her naprapath, Dr. Kim Selir, employs a variety of techniques because, while headaches are prevalent, the causes vary from patient to patient. She concentrates on three aspects in her practice: eating, moving, and thinking. “[That] combination of things is where our balance lies,” she explains. “When that gets out of balance, the body can’t function appropriately.”

There could be several causes for any head pain, including lack of sleep, not enough nutrients, and tension. The answer could be as simple as inadequate water intake or lack of exercise. Dr. Selir also examines general lifestyle issues, such as interactions with family or if career and finances are causing stress.

“You really have to sit and listen to the individual.” Dr. Selir continues, “To me, it’s really sitting and listening and figuring out what the cause or multiple causes are. There’s a reason that the body is not able to function at its optimum. Unless you came out of the womb having headaches, then something happened somewhere along the line that is causing that to happen.”

Dr. Selir gave Hussain the tools to help her deal with the reasons that could be leading to her pain, and it led to some larger changes. “She really got to the bottom; it’s not just one thing,” she expands. “It can be stress, but where’s the stress coming from? It can be diet; it can be not moving enough during the day. It made me think about all the things; it was like a whole lifestyle change.”

Dr. Oakley himself suffered from migraines for six years as a teenager and uses the same techniques he prescribes to patients. “The first step is always going to be lifestyle,” he says. This includes eliminating stress, which he admits is much easier said than done. “A little bit of stress can be
When it comes to migraines, though, Dr. Oakley says there’s no real explanation for why some suffer them and others don’t. He and others do know that patients have brains that function differently, with higher levels of melatonin and serotonin. Nerves also process pain differently. Genetics can contribute, and hormones are a factor as well, which is why women usually suffer more than men do and often experience symptoms around their menstrual cycles. Dr. Oakley says there is even evidence that socioeconomics play a role. Additionally, there are many external issues out of people’s control, such as a change in barometric pressure.

Dr. Oakley gives his patients complementary alternative therapies—physical therapy, massage, relaxation, acupuncture, cognitive behavioral therapy—which he admits may not work for everyone and, therefore, may not be cost-effective, as they’re usually not covered in health plans. It’s also up to patients to test out different options and see what may or may not help.

Dr. Oakley looks at medication and daily prevention as the final prong of care. “It has to be disabling enough that it’s causing problems—for kids [it’s] missing school. For adults, it’s missing work or family affairs,” he expands. For people like Hussain, too, they have to understand that there’s no cure, just ways to temper occurrences.

Hussain followed many similar recommendations in her quest to live a pain-free life. She pinpointed some triggers, such as hunger, dehydration, and exhaustion. She visited Dr. Selir’s office three times a week for four months for manipulation of muscles and tissues. Because the procedures aren’t covered by insurance, she didn’t continue them, but months out she has still felt the positive effects. A bad ache hasn’t hit her since seeing Dr. Selir, although she plans to take medication if she faces another episode that keeps her from her life and work. While she’d prefer not to take the drugs, using them every once in a while is a much easier prospect for her than having to rely on them constantly.

That’s also a respite after 20 years of suffering. “When you’re a migraine sufferer, you’d mortgage your house for some relief,” she contends. After experimenting with different solutions, Hussain is happy to have found a balance that seems to be helping. “It was awful; it was really bad. It’s drastically improved,” she says.

Perhaps not as trendy today as in the last couple decades, no- and low-carb diets are still quite popular. The idea, which is supported by science, is that if the body isn’t consuming enough carbs to fulfill its energy purposes, then it will begin to burn fat instead. Although this does work in the short-term, especially for those looking to lose a substantial amount of weight in a short period of time, it is not a lifestyle that should be implemented for the long term. “The danger of breaking down fat only for long periods of time is a buildup of ketones. It is called ketosis,” explains Ahmad. “It causes headaches, nausea, bad breath, and is not an optimal metabolic state to be in. So yes, you can survive with no carbs, but you will probably be cranky all the time.”

In the long run, low-carb diets cannot be sustained. Your body needs complex carbs, and even sugars, in order to control and maintain several necessary bodily functions. Rather than focusing on carb quantity, instead pay attention to the carb quality. Weight loss will be gradual but healthy and more likely permanent, leading to more energy, better sleep cycles, and a stable mood. 

**NADIA MALIK** holds a degree in journalism and is a former reporter for a Chicago-area newspaper. She has written for websites and publications and has also worked for several non-profit organizations.
HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

American Lamb – Local Flavor, World Class Taste

American lamb is a flavorful, nutrient-rich food and an excellent source of vitamin B12, niacin, zinc, and selenium. Locally grown American lamb is fresh, not frozen and halal certified.

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No artificial or synthetic growth hormones are used in lamb production in the U.S.

American lamb is up to 10,000 miles and 30 days fresher than imported product.

Although growth hormones are not used in U.S. lamb production, they are legal to use.

Nutrition Source: USDA National Nutrient Database

Find recipes, videos on our farms, certified halal suppliers, and more at: www.americanlamblovers.com or call the American Lamb Board at 1-866-327-LAMB (5262).
As a tap dance instructor for over 10 years who mainly teaches children and teenagers, I’ve had the pleasure of teaching a handful of people above college age. The majority of my students have been dancing since around age three. In the last year or so however, I’ve seen more and more interest in tap dancing from adults over the age of 50. Some of these people studied dance briefly as children, but many, like the delightful 93-year-old I once taught, are learning the art for the first time. They all have different reasons and goals for starting and have expressed relief and joy at finding it easy to engage in a variety of physical activities.

Awareness of the importance of physical activity is increasing, and so are program options. From gyms to dance studios, from park districts to YMCAs and hospital-affiliated fitness centers, classes and programs tailored towards retired people, or those approaching retirement, abound. Some popular physical activities and fitness classes among older adults today include yoga, Tai Chi, pickleball, ballet barre workouts, dance-inspired aerobics, Zumba, and water fitness.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend that people 65 years old and above (with no physical or health limitations as directed by medical professionals) should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity a week. For additional benefits, the WHO recommends that older adults raise their time spent in weekly moderate-level physical activities to 300 minutes, or vigorous-intensity activities to 150 minutes. Many organizations also recommend that aerobic activities should be done for at least 20 minutes consecutively.

The WHO and CDC recommend older adults also include two or more days a week of muscle-strengthening activities that work all major muscle groups. Stated benefits of combined weight bearing and aerobic exercise include improving cardiovascular and respiratory fitness, bone
health, and functional physical ability including balance and joint mobility. Following these recommendations also lowers people’s risk of falls, non-communicable disease, depression, and cognitive decline.

To some, the amount of physical activity suggested might seem intimidating. Generally, it’s a pretty recent phenomenon to have to decide what physical activity we prefer and implement that in our lives. Physical fitness today has had to become more intentional; it’s less intertwined into our daily life as it once was.

One of the many options older adults have when searching for organized group fitness courses is local park districts. Meghan Papke, the adult activity supervisor at a park district in the Chicago suburbs, says one of the most popular activities offered there for older adults is pickleball. Pickleball combines elements of tennis, badminton, and ping pong, is played as singles or doubles on a badminton-sized court, and has seen a surge in popularity in recent years. It’s accessible to all ages and many physical ability levels.

In addition to a variety of locations where people can go to improve their physical health, there’s also a variety of exercise genres. Papke added that at her park district, physical fitness classes offered for older adults include light cardio, sit/stretch/tone, Tai Chi, and boot camp courses. “We’ve offered Tai Chi for decades,” Papke explains, and four years ago they “started adding more fitness classes for older adults” and enrollment has increased from there. Papke says that probably half of program participants have led an active lifestyle for most of their lives, while others “realize they need to keep active, and what better way than to do it with friends?”

...people 65 years old and above should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity a week.

Jamey Schuett, a YMCA fitness instructor in northern Illinois, teaches many classes that are tailored to retirement-age adults, including Zumba, chair yoga, water exercise courses, and classes focused specifically on range of motion. Schuett points out that finances can be a real hindrance for people seeking to improve fitness; many seniors are living on a fixed income. To help them get free or reduced cost memberships to fitness centers (like the YMCA), some insurance providers have begun partnering with these fitness centers. When classes are included in memberships, Schuett’s classes are well-attended.

Darla LaQuinta, a retired music teacher, recently began taking private tap dance lessons. Growing up, beyond bike riding and the dance movements involved in musical performances and music teaching, she wasn’t too involved in organized physical activities. But as a musician, tap dance always intrigued her. She grew up in a large family and finances were limited, so it wasn’t until she retired that she was able to take formal lessons.

Regarding benefits she has gained from tap dance lessons, LaQuinta says “I’m learning a lot about body alignment and posture...physically, my balance has improved considerably and I feel my body getting stronger all the time. I’ve benefited from the sense of accomplishment I feel.”

Like many active older adults, LaQuinta takes care of her physical health in numerous ways. She goes on many outdoor walks with her dog, enjoying natural surroundings and encounters with neighbors. She wears a fitness tracker that logs her daily steps and motivates her to push for more. She has a recumbent bike at home to use while watching TV in colder months. LaQuinta also works out at a local Curves gym; Curves is a franchised fitness center targeted at women. One of their most popular offerings is a circuit workout program supported by a coach. LaQuinta enjoys the fitness gains and camaraderie she finds there.

The benefits LaQuinta has received from the physical activities she’s involved with clearly line up with current scientific knowledge regarding benefits of exercise: improved balance and strength in addition to greater mental health and well-being.

Fortunately, today we live in a society that increasingly values physical health and sees its connection to living full, long, functioning, and happy lives. There are a number of varying physical abilities and personal preferences among people, but these factors need not limit one’s participation. The more active we become, the easier it is to stay active. Functional movement expert Gray Cook says, “We are meant to grow strong and to age gracefully. Reclamation of authentic movement is the starting point.”

No matter what age we are, as our activity levels rise, so does our quality and enjoyment of life. Let’s not put our physical health to the side; get out there and explore.

SAMANTHA NEWMAN is a dance teacher and mother of two in the Chicago suburbs. She holds a BA in theater arts studies, focusing on design and playwriting, from Brigham Young University.

Samantha Newman is a dance teacher and mother of two in the Chicago suburbs. She holds a BA in theater arts studies, focusing on design and playwriting, from Brigham Young University.
From cooking to cleaning to healing, vinegar is considered one of the most flexible ingredients when it comes to its usage. An ancient liquid dating as far back as 10,000 years, vinegar has not changed much from its origin. Named after its sour taste, vinegar comes in a variety of flavors and has a wide array of uses.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]) said, “What an excellent condiment vinegar is” (Tirmidhi). He also stated that the house that has vinegar would not suffer poverty (Tirmidhi). These two statements alone are reason enough to bring home a tall bottle of vinegar right away. However, if you’re not accustomed to using vinegar, how practical is it to have around your house?

For starters, vinegar has many medicinal qualities like easing digestive issues, improving blood sugar levels, and protecting your heart health. With so many health benefits, downing a vinegar/water solution daily might contribute to a healthier you.

Dr. Khadija Jamal enjoys using vinegar as part of her stir-fry sauce. She mixes it in with soy sauce, sugar, and some basic seasonings including black pepper, ginger, and garlic. “With my work schedule, I don’t get much time to make elaborate meals,” shares the South Hampton, New Hampshire, resident. “I like quick, easy meals but without having to sacrifice flavor. Vinegar perks up the taste of anything sautéed, be it prawns, noodles, or vegetables such as eggplant or mushrooms.”

Aside from sauces, vinegar can also be used to marinate foods or even to cleanse meats and vegetables, as research shows it helps kill bacteria. For Canadian mother of two, Eman Manigat, vinegar is a staple ingredient in her food preparations. “As Haitians, our food is a blend of French, Spanish, and African cuisines, and one thing we are very particular about is there not being any stench in our cooked meat,” shares the IT Specialist. “To get rid of that natural smell raw meat carries, the meat is soaked in vinegar and salt, preferably overnight. Then before washing, I scrub the now-softened meat or fish with more vinegar and some cut-up quarters of fresh lemon or lime. This reduces the meat’s odor significantly.”

Manigat says both her mother and mother-in-law are great Haitian food cooks, and she has learned a lot from their expertise. “I had to step up my game for my husband and kids,” she jokes. “Seriously, though, preparing home-cooked meals is important to me as I was raised with this tradition. Haitian food takes time, especially its preparation, in which vinegar has a big part. All that effort comes out when you taste the food, and you can enjoy the love that went into making it.”

“What an excellent condiment vinegar is.” —Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), Tirmidhi

For some, like Raghad Alsayed, a teacher from Winnipeg, Canada, vinegar is more than just an ingredient; it’s part of a tradition.
“One Syrian practice I miss so much is the gifting of fresh vinegar,” Alsayed, who moved to Canada from Damascus four years ago, reminisces. “In the fall harvest season, we would receive homemade organic apple [cider] vinegar from friends who owned orchards. I have yet to find anything even close to that here [in Canada].”

Something as simple as making salad dressing with vinegar makes Alsayed nostalgic; her fattoush salad is a favorite amongst her friends.

“Vinegar is commonly used in Syria, and I think it’s stronger and more concentrated there,” she notes. “When you would open a bottle, its pungent smell would go straight up your nose. There was no questioning its freshness,” Alsayed recalls with a smile.

Pickling is a family tradition Jenn C. of Michigan practices with vinegar. Tired of wilted and bitter-tasting jarred vegetables at the store, Jenn decided to pickle her own produce.

“I wanted to sustain the freshness and flavors of my vegetables,” says the mother of four. “Pickling is one of the easiest and most efficient ways to do that without artificial flavors or preservatives.”

Jenn’s favorite pickled vegetable is turnips. “I like the ones with the pink coloring,” she says. “To bring in that beautiful pink color, I add some beets. After a week or so of sitting in vinegar, the color of the beets seeps into the turnip.”

You can see how vinegar is a loved and appreciated household sunnah (way of the Prophet [PBUH]) that is worth incorporating into your life. It may be ancient, but there are still so many modern-day uses for this versatile liquid.

TAYYABA SYED is an award-winning author and journalist whose work has been featured on numerous publications including NPR. She recently co-authored her first children’s book. She lives with her husband and three children in Illinois.
Thiamine: A Wonder Vitamin

By Taskeen Khan

In the world of vitamins, the stars are vitamin C, vitamin D, and vitamin A, boasting the ability to improve everything from skin to eyesight to memory. However, one of the most important vitamins is an unsung hero: vitamin B1, also known as thiamine.

Just as a superhero helps the police discover where criminals are hiding their precious jewels, thiamine aids our body in uncovering the valuable energy stored in our food. To do this, thiamine helps our bodies convert food into glucose, which can then be broken down to provide energy. Have you ever felt energized after eating a meal? Thiamine is the vitamin responsible for that. Until our food is converted into glucose, our bodies are not able to benefit from it very much, or use it as fuel. This energy that thiamine unlocks is key to almost everything our bodies do.

As described by Mayo Clinic, “Thiamine is involved in many body functions, including nervous system and muscle function, the flow of electrolytes in and out of nerve and muscle cells, digestion, and carbohydrate metabolism.” Thiamine can also help reduce the risk of cataracts, kidney disease in people with diabetes, and painful menstruation according to Dr. Rafi Shaik, an IFANCA food scientist. Additionally, as described by Mayo Clinic, thiamine is being used to help treat metabolic disorders that accompany certain genetic conditions such as Leigh’s disease.

Though this is not where the importance of thiamine ends. Researchers believe thiamine still has untapped potential. Mayo Clinic further explains researchers are also studying how to use thiamine to treat alcoholism. The University of Maryland Medical Center also states, “Oral thiamine has been shown to improve cognitive function of patients with Alzheimer. However [...] more research is needed before thiamine can be proposed as a treatment for Alzheimer disease.” With the many current and potential benefits of thiamine, it is clear that a lack of it will negatively impact our bodies.

Without Batman, Gotham City takes a turn for the worse, just as our health does without thiamine. When thiamine concentration is low, the cells in our body are deprived of energy, causing fatigue, irritability, and nausea. However, thiamine deficiencies are uncommon, since many countries require certain foods be thiamine fortified. In America, foods made with processed flour must have thiamine added to them, since the natural thiamine, stored in the hull of the grain, is lost in processing. This is why cereals, often made from processed flour, are one of the most common sources of thiamine in America. The National Institutes of Health estimate that Americans get about half their thiamine from fortified foods. However, those in developing nations often do not have access to thiamine fortified foods. The University of Maryland Medical Center explains this leaves them vulnerable to conditions such as Beriberi and Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, both of which can manifest in many forms, including confusion and shaking. If an increase in thiamine is provided, the effects of both these conditions can be limited.

In addition to cereal, Dr. Mian Riaz, director of Food Protein R&D Center, Texas A&M, says that sunflower and sesame seeds, wheat germ, green peas, lean meat, and nuts (especially cashews, peanuts, Brazil nuts, pistachios, and pine nuts) are all recommended sources of thiamine. Foods such as vegetables, fruits, and dairy also contain thiamine, but not in very large quantities. However, the thiamine they provide can be important when eaten in high concentrations, especially for those who are vegetarian and not getting any thiamine from lean meat sources. Making sure enough thiamine-rich sources are consumed is especially important for the elderly, whose bodies are not able to absorb thiamine as efficiently.
It's important to keep in mind that not all sources of thiamine are equal. A food's thiamine concentration often decreases as it is heated. This means, meat, which is cooked, does not always have as much thiamine as one would expect.

Thiamine is a vitamin our body does not store, with depletion taking about 14 days, so it is important to make sure you get enough on a regular basis. For those who do not have regular sources of thiamine in their diet, thiamine supplements are another option. However, it is important to make sure the thiamine in your supplements is halal. Dr. Riaz explains, “Most of the grain-based thiamine is halal. But some time during processing the manufacturer may add some additive which may not be halal. Therefore, it is advisable that consumers always ask for halal-certified thiamine.” The safest bet is to look for the Crescent-M on the bottle; then you’ll know your supplements are halal.

Just as a Superman sighting revitalizes Metropolis, reminding the people they have a hero to depend on, thiamine revitalizes our bodies. It restores energy to our cells and gives us the extra push we need to keep going. Thiamine is truly a superhero our bodies need.

TASKEEN KHAN currently attends UIUC. She has previously written for Huffington Post Teen and Islamic Horizons Magazine. Khan has also won several Silver Keys and honorable mentions in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.

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ICNA RELIEF USA
Savory Spicy Winter Muffins
By: YaQutullah Ibraheem Muhammad MS, RDN, LD

Servings: 12–14

INGREDIENTS

- 2¼ cups flour of your choice
- ⅔ cup brown sugar
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon nutmeg
- ⅛ teaspoon allspice
- ⅛ teaspoon cloves
- ⅛ teaspoon ginger
- 2⅛ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup Organic Valley® Organic Butter, softened
- 1 large egg
- ¾ cup cooked mashed pumpkin
- ½ cup Mariani Golden Raisins
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 1 cup Organic Valley® Organic Buttermilk
- powdered sugar, for tops as garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat oven to 400°F. Grease muffin tin with butter.
2. Mix flour, sugars, spices, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. Cut in butter with pastry blender or a food processor until crumbly.
3. Beat egg in a medium bowl; stir in pumpkin, raisins, orange zest, and buttermilk. Add to flour mixture until just blended.
4. Fill muffin cups ¾ full. Sprinkle tops with sugar.
5. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until lightly browned and a toothpick comes out of the center clean.
6. Serve with apple, pecan, or lemon butter. ✯
Slow-Cooker Fasoolia Khadra (Beef and Green Bean Stew)

By: Alia Shalabi

Servings: 10-12

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds halal beef chuck, cut in chunks
1 medium onion, diced
2 (26.46-ounce) boxes chopped/diced tomatoes
2 cloves garlic, chopped or minced
2 pounds green beans, fresh (trimmed) or frozen
1 tablespoon 7-spice blend
3 teaspoons salt, divided
1 ½ teaspoons pepper, divided

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat a skillet over high heat. Add meat chunks and onion; season with 7-spice blend, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Sauté until meat is browned.

2. Add browned meat, onions, and juices to the slow-cooker. Top with tomatoes, garlic, and green beans. Make sure the green beans are on top. Season with remaining salt and pepper.

3. Cook on low for 6 to 8 hours or high for 3 to 5 hours.

4. Serve over white rice.
Triple Berry Smoothie
By: Dr. Azeem Haleem

Servings: 1

INGREDIENTS

1 banana
1 kiwi
½ apple
1 cup black seedless grapes
3 tablespoons organic honey
1 teaspoon of turmeric powder
1 tablespoon kalonji
3 tablespoons Cabot Greek-Style Yogurt
2 tablespoons walnuts
  frozen triple berry mix
  frozen blueberries
  frozen strawberries
100% grape juice (no sugar added)

DIRECTIONS

1. Blend all ingredients together and drink! 🍹
Banana Bread
By: Alia Shalabi

Servings: 10–12

INGREDIENTS
- 3 ripe bananas
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 ½ cups flour of your choice
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup chopped walnuts, optional

DIRECTIONS
1. Preheat oven to 325°F.
2. Mash bananas with a fork.
3. Stir in remaining ingredients until well combined.
4. Pour into a greased loaf pan and bake for 50 to 60 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
5. Cool for 5 minutes; remove from pan and cool completely on a wire rack.
Some foods are just easy to love. Try as we might to resist chocolate cake, potato chips, or soda pop, as soon as we have the chance, we cave and we devour, often reaching for seconds.

Before you let the guilt settle, take note: food addiction is more than just a self-diagnosed lack of willpower. Scientists, nutritionists, and doctors unanimously agree that when it comes to craving certain foods, there’s plenty at play internally that’s causing your New Year’s resolutions to falter.

**Food’s Effect on the Brain**

We tend to think about food on a rather binary scale. We like this; we do not like that. Pass me the pie, keep the Brussels sprouts at the other end of the table. From a health and wellness perspective, this makes sense. These favorite treats and delectable desserts are actually causing a measurable reaction in our bodies; our minds enjoy the foods, but physiologically speaking, they can do harm to our bodies.

Dr. Mark Berman is a practicing physician at One Medical Group, director of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, and head of health at www.FareWell.io, an online dietary intervention program. The program combines the latest evidence in nutrition science with digital tools and a multidisciplinary support team to bridge the gap between physicians and prescriptions.

In Dr. Berman’s world, food is measured by its palatability. Foods that are highly palatable are foods that trigger the brain pathways associated with rewards and release increased levels of the feel-good chemical dopamine.

“These neural pathways produce the sensations of pleasure and satisfaction—and the termination of unpleasant signals, like hunger or anxiety,” explains Dr. Berman.

While we all experience a measure of joy from these neural effects associated with eating, food addiction occurs when other key components are at play, such as mental instability or illness.

Amber Madden, a licensed counselor specializing in eating disorders and obesity issues, believes food addiction is as much physical as it is psychological. After nearly a decade serving as the medical director of the Center of Weight Loss at Cedars Sinai Medical Center, Madden has witnessed the correlation firsthand.

“Overeating or disordered eating patterns are most likely a way for a person to cope with negative emotions when they don’t otherwise know how to healthfully,” she says.

Couple this with the release of Dr. Berman’s aforementioned ‘triggering reward’ and the results are serious.
“You have someone that is having an experience with food equivalent to someone who takes a hit from heroin,” Madden says.

**The Secret Substances Inside Addictive Foods**

Highly palatable foods, according to Dr. Berman, tend to be substances that have a high concentration of fat, sugar, and/or salt. For whatever reason, these three categories cause the greatest increase in dopamine production in the human body.

In Madden’s experience working with patients, sugar is the obvious frontrunner. This is likely because, as Madden points out, “Sugar is in almost everything we eat, especially processed foods we may not even realize [contain sugar].”

Sugar is especially difficult to avoid because it comes in so many different forms, including the far-from-natural glucose-fructose syrup (i.e., high fructose corn syrup) and Lycasin, a trade name for hydrogenated glucose syrup.

“Our bodies are used to dealing with natural substances,” says Rob Jackson, a former sugar addict and current personal trainer at Purpose FIT, a fitness center in London. Honey, for instance, is a natural sugar readily recognized by the brain, which in turn calmly reacts to the increase in sugar to ensure a stable blood sugar level. The brain also knows when it should trigger the body that it’s had enough, Jackson shares.

Manufactured sugars trigger the exact opposite response. The brain doesn’t know when enough is enough, let alone how to appropriately regulate the body. “We do not feel like we’ve had enough because the brain is not receiving the signals. That’s why we continue to eat more of whatever sugary snack it is,” says Jackson.

These small secret substances inside our food, though invisible, can have huge effects on our bodies.

“**You have someone that is having an experience with food equivalent to someone who takes a hit from heroin.**”

“I have worked with addicted substance abuse clients and also people suffering from food addictive behaviors, and there are so many similarities,” says Madden, referencing a research study that demonstrated how when an individual consumes sugar, the reward centers in the brain light up the same way they do for someone that uses drugs.

“Since our diet has a constant supply of sugar in everything from bread to even the meats that we eat, we are on a constant sugar high,” she says.

**Foods to Forget**

Avoiding addiction starts with avoiding sneaky unhealthy, addictive ingredients. Accomplishing this takes a little finesse and a lot of persistence.

Dr. Irving Cohen, a preventive medicine physician in Topeka, Kansas, currently works with the Foundation for Prevention. Having written numerous books related to
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obesity and diabetes epidemics, he says that loose labeling laws make avoiding foods with toxic ingredients a challenge.

Dr. Cohen believes that the increasing use of food additives, most notably glutamate flavor enhancers and sugar, paired with inappropriate labeling standards, is to blame for the worldwide health problems he’s written so extensively about.

Your best bet for nixing potentially addictive food is to go all-natural.

Jackson offers this simple strategy: “Anything in the supermarket which is brightly colored and cheap is probably bad [for your health]. Eat only food that is as close to its natural state as possible. Anything that has been heavily processed and has a long list of additives on the back is not ideal,” he advises.

**Tips For the Addicted**

Concerned that you’re already addicted to eating? The road to recovery is difficult, but certainly not impossible.

“From personal experience I know how hard it is to stop eating these foods,” says Jackson. “The turning point came when I admitted to myself that I had an addiction. I wanted to get healthier so I needed to make a change,” he shares.

Once you’ve acknowledged your addiction, Jackson recommends **implementing a few basic but effective actions that will keep your momentum going as you tackle this new lifestyle:**

1. Stock up on good-quality foods to resist cravings. This includes fresh fruit, nuts and seeds, vegetables and hummus, and cooked, halal meats.

2. Search and destroy.
   “All low-quality foods MUST be removed from your reach,” says Jackson. “Out of sight, out of mind. If you have bad foods in the house, you are going to eat them. It’s that simple.”

3. Counter cravings with a cup of tasty herbal tea.

4. Drink 500ml of water whenever you feel thirsty or have cravings.
   “Dehydration can manifest itself as hunger, so it pays to drink first,” Jackson notes.

5. Trick yourself into thinking you don’t need to eat by brushing your teeth.

Successfully fighting food addiction takes commitment. David Nico PhD, “Dr. Healthnut,” the author of the #1 Amazon Bestseller *Diet Diagnosis*, reminds us that, like it or not, a true cleanse is necessary to really conquer addiction.

“A small amount of addictive ingredients trains the brain to consume more,” he states, adding that these foods are ‘low-or-no nutrient foods,’ with little to offer the body.

However, there’s light at the end of the tunnel. “If we train our gut and brain to prefer highly nutritious food, the addictive ingredients are less appealing,” he says.

**An Ongoing Journey**

For the layperson, the science behind food addictions may feel like a lecture you wish you would’ve heard years ago in school. It’s not too late to learn, though. Eating is a lifelong practice, and so too is the exploration of why and how what we put in our mouths affects our day-to-day living.

Freelance writer **SUMMER FANOUS** sees the world through unique lenses, thanks to her experiences living in North America and the Middle East. Her passion is using words to craft effective, concise and meaningful written content.
THE POWER OF A SINGLE DROP:
COULD ESSENTIAL OILS BE THE CURE?

By Summer Fanous
Ward away bed bugs, get rid of your acne, and regulate your digestive system—all with just a few drops of essential oil. That’s the claim, but could it possibly be true?

Essential oils may currently be all the rage, but that doesn’t mean they’re new to the scene. Actually, these potent plant-based extracts date back thousands of years to legendary people and cultures, from the ancient Chinese to the infamous Egyptians. In fact, the United States National Library of Medicine can even trace such oils to prominent 12th century Islamic botanists who explored their usefulness for all types of medicinal practices.

Today, over one hundred different oils from all over the world have been named. It seems there’s an oil for each and every cough, scratch, and blemish. Could one of these oils be the all-natural cure you’ve been waiting for? Dig through the details, including input from leading industry experts, to decide.

**Essential Oils 101**

What are essential oils, anyway?

Erika Elmuts, brand strategist and essential oil expert at ARIIX, explains, “Essential oils are fragrant, highly concentrated natural compounds distilled from plants. These can be from flowers, leaves, bark, roots, or other areas of the plant.”

It was early Islamic botanists’ knowledge of this same basic distillation process, in fact, that enabled these pioneers to craft their own oils generations ago. Through distilling, highly concentrated oils can be extracted. These oils are even more concentrated than herbs. It takes nearly five thousand pounds of rose petals to make just one pound of rose essential oil. This means that even one little drop of essential oil is extremely potent and potentially powerful.

In addition to rose, other types of common essential oils include:

- Lavender
- Peppermint
- Lemon
- Eucalyptus
- Tea Tree
- Frankincense
- Bergamot
- Myrrh
- Chamomile
- Cedarwood

Each oil has its own home, its own history, its own function. Some are also quite valuable. “Because they are made from plants, the raw materials for oils are susceptible to Mother Nature. If there is a drought one year, the yield of that crop could be substantially reduced, making that oil even more precious than it already is,” says Elmuts.

**The Many Functions of Essential Oils**

A high-quality essential oil can serve any number of purposes. Most commonly, these aromatic oils are used to regulate mood by relieving stress.

If anyone is in the business of stress relief, it’s Marilyn Eppolite. Eppolite is an energy therapist at The Wisdom Within, where she helps clients “transform drama, trauma, and chaos into emotional balance.” She helps patients overcome fear and anxiety through energy healing, a practice that focuses on unlocking inner wisdom through mindfulness, examining and improving one’s ‘self talk,’ and rebuilding confidence.

It takes nearly five thousand pounds of rose petals to make just one pound of rose essential oil.

Over the course of 15 years, Eppolite has experimented with using essential oils in a variety of ways. In her therapy work, she most commonly puts oils to use for emotional balance, particularly when helping clients overcome overwhelming anxiety, grief, or sadness. On a personal level, she has used different kinds of essential oils for everything from hormonal balance to post-surgery healing and muscular problems.

“I started using [essential oils] because I am sensitive to drugs,” Eppolite says. “I find that essential oils are both gentle and powerful, easier to assimilate,” she noted.

Other popular uses for essential oils include:

- Eliminating odors
- Easing discomfort of digestive issues
- Treating headaches
- Flavoring food and water
- Cleaning
- Providing skin support to minimize blemishes
- Managing muscular pain
- Assisting in meditation
Curtis Hays, of Curtis Hays Consulting, and his wife, Stefanie, were originally skeptical. Like many, the couple had come across essential oils here and there. They’d hear mention of it at the gym, from that talkative mom at the school bus stop, or through posts on social media. At first, they rolled their eyes, shrugging the hype off as “a new fad.” But despite the skepticism, their curiosity had been sparked. Curtis and Stefanie started experimenting, just a little, with different types of essential oils. Over time, they joined the trend wholeheartedly. Today, they continue to be amazed by the results.

“We’ve been using essential oils for more than a year and a half,” says Curtis. “Stefanie is an independent distributor, and they have completely changed the health and wellness for our family,” he remarks.

There are three main ways the family actually utilizes the oils they have become so passionate about: aromatic, topical, and internal.

“Aromatic can be through a diffuser or just straight-up opening the bottle and smelling it. Pretty easy, right?” asks Stefanie. “On top of the amazing smells, you are actually gaining health supporting benefits just by breathing in the tiny molecules.”

“Topical is the equivalent of putting a drop of oil in your hand, mixing it with a carrier oil, and putting it on your skin.”

As a carrier oil, Stefanie suggests using coconut oil, olive oil, or any fatty oil you have in your pantry.

Finally, “Some oils can be ingested, and when used properly are extremely powerful.” To try ingesting essential oils, simply add a drop of oil to your water, whatever you are cooking, or place directly in your mouth, per the oil’s instructions.

A Word of Caution

Due to their high concentration, it’s important to note the potential risks involved with essential oils. That’s the message from Jay Goodbinder PScD, who serves clients at The Epigenetics Healing Center, based in Overland Park, Kansas. Though Goodbinder openly affirms the use of essential oils, he cautions against using them daily.

“At the level of concentration they are at, they are powerful. They can be effective, but they can also harm someone,” Goodbinder said.

As an example, Goodbinder looks to lavender, one of the most commonly used types of oil for reducing stress and improving sleep. Though lavender can be wonderfully therapeutic, Goodbinder points out that the oil also has “an estrogen creation ability.” This means that, at its extreme, exposure to too much oil could result in men developing breasts and women getting fibrocystic breast disease, breast cancer, uterine fibroid, and other serious conditions.

This doesn’t mean nixing essential oils altogether. Rather, Goodbinder recommends treating essential oils with the same respect you would any other natural medicine: follow directions and consult your doctor with any questions or concerns.

Essential Oils Recipes

Whether or not essential oils are the cure you’ve been seeking is completely up to you. Discover the answer for yourself by trying essential oils at home today. Start with one of these DIY essential oil recipes, shared by the experts.
Hundreds of years of history, hundreds of different oils, one tiny drop. Essential oils may not be the cure-all answer for everything and everyone, but the verdict seems clear that, for many, these fragrant oils have worked wonders. From making your own all-natural face wash to simply sweetening a glass of water, how might you take advantage of one of today’s most trendy topics and history’s most renowned remedies?

**Freelance writer SUMMER FANOUS** sees the world through unique lenses, thanks to her experiences living in North America and the Middle East. Her passion is using words to craft effective, concise and meaningful written content.

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**Homemade Face Wash** by Stefanie Hays

**INGREDIENTS**
- 1/2 teaspoon sweet almond oil
- 1/2 cup castile soap
- 20 drops essential oil of choice
- 2/3 cups distilled water

**DIRECTIONS**
1. Pour the sweet almond oil and castile soap into a foaming soap dispenser.
2. Add the essential oil; swirl to combine.
3. Fill the container with distilled water and screw on the top.

**Non-toxic Household Cleaner** by Erika Elmuts

**INGREDIENTS**
- 16-ounce glass spray bottle
- 30 drops Sentry
- 1/4 cup rubbing alcohol
- 1 3/4 cups water

**DIRECTIONS**
1. Place oil and alcohol into the spray bottle.
2. Fill the rest of the bottle with water.
3. Use to clean countertops, bathrooms, floors, etc.

**Immune Boosting Roller** by Stefanie Hays

**INGREDIENTS**
- 20 drops thieves
- 20 drops frankincense
- 20 drops lemon
- 1 tablespoon grapeseed oil

**DIRECTIONS**
1. Mix all ingredients in a 15-milliliter roller bottle.
2. Apply to the bottoms of feet and cover with socks before bed.

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