



Denise Barratt, author of "Vine Ripe Nutrition" and a registered dietitian.

# Food

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blog traffic.

Carbs, frequently vilified by food gurus, are naturally found in fruits, vegetables and grains, and are necessary to run the body's metabolic pathways, for example. Their sudden elimination can send people in a tailspin of low energy. "They actually help you, chemically, burn fats," Barratt said. "But so many people think that, because we eat, we know."

Even if a blogger's heart might be in the right place, his or her training might not, Barratt said. "If we're going to have heart surgery, we don't go online to find out how to do it. Why wouldn't they want to get information from somebody who actually studied?"

Mission Health weight management specialist Elizabeth Holmes says a one-size-fits all health cure doesn't exist.

"You have to find the right balance," she said. "Nothing's going to work 100 percent for one person or another."

## Searching for a quick fix

Holmes sometimes works with clients with strong misconceptions about what's healthiest for them, fed by recommendations from bloggers and other lifestyle "experts" with no real credentials.

The slim Hari credits her physique to eliminating toxins from her diet, among other claims, and her entreaties to "break free of hidden toxins" and avoid difficult to pronounce food ingredients particularly vex Holmes. Tocopheryl acetate — or, more commonly, vitamin E — is rather difficult to pronounce, but does wonders for the skin, Holmes pointed out.

As for toxins? Holmes said there's no way to detox with teas, juice or any other magic fix. When properly functioning, your liver and kidneys should take care of all waste removal, she said.

Currently in vogue, juice cleanses add loads of sugar and carbs to the body, Holmes said. They also strip protein from muscles to provide the body with much-needed nutrients, throwing off the body's acid balance. "Which, in itself, can increase the risk of things like cancer," she added. "Natural doesn't mean healthy, and artificial doesn't mean unhealthy

— arsenic is natural, and it will kill you."

Another oft-lauded miracle food is coconut oil. But full of saturated fat, most medical associations recommend against swapping healthy oils for coconut oils, Holmes said.

Coconut oil raises high-density lipoprotein, also known as "good cholesterol." But it also raises your bad cholesterol.

"So most medical associations say that the negative side effects of raising the bad actually cancels out the good cholesterol," Holmes said. "The only other way to raise your good cholesterol is to exercise, and people would rather eat than exercise."

Another supposed miracle ingredient, coconut water, is often used as a recovery drink after sports. But it's high in only one electrolyte — potassium — even though sweating causes depletion of magnesium and sodium, too. That means drinking too much coconut water can throw off the human body's balance of electrolytes.

"And too much potassium can actually be bad for your heart," Holmes said. "I really never recommend coconut water to anyone; it's mostly a lot of marketing. If you have kidney disease, and you drink a lot of coconut water, it can actually really be dangerous."

## The dangers of food fanaticism

As often as some ingredients are touted as superfoods, others become super villains.

Sugar is the villain du jour, says Ingles Markets dietitian Leah McGrath, but sugar substitutes like aspartame have long been viewed with the most suspicion. "But all cases that I'm aware of that any problems with cancer were in labs with rats and the amounts they were given were extremely high," she said.

The American Cancer Society, which says aspartame is safe, says infamous lab studies focusing on the dangers of the sweetener often fed animals in doses higher than 4,000 mg per day over their lifetimes. But the vast majority of the studies found no health problems consistently linked with aspartame.

Just two studies suggested very high doses might increase the risk of blood-related cancers in rats. The Food and Drug Administration, however, questioned the results. Regardless, the FDA's



Ingles dietitian Leah McGrath.

recommended daily limit for aspartame is 20 cans of diet soda, about 1 percent of the level that raised health concerns in those studies.

But even if aspartame doesn't kill, sometimes food fanaticism can.

Balance Point Collaborative registered dietitian Kendra Gaffney specializes in weight management and eating disorders, including anorexia and another disorder that's showing up in the media as of late: orthorexia, an obsession with eating healthy foods.

"A lot of these myths and righteousness about food come into play, and these people take it to a whole new level," Gaffney said.

Orthorexia is particularly pronounced in food-focused Asheville, surpassing any other state where Gaffney has worked. "I think there's a fair amount of health-conscious people here, and a lot of people can take that to the extreme," she said.

Some of Gaffney's clients, for example, have chosen not to pay their bills to support an all-organic lifestyle. Others occupy their days with obsessive-compulsive label reading.

She's even had some clients rendered suicidal over lack of food choices. "It's serious business," she said.

## Shilling for clicks

McGrath takes issue with lifestyle gurus ratcheting up consumer fear about food. Some say gluten is the devil, though only a small percentage of people have been diagnosed with a true intolerance to the common protein. Others say conven-

tional milk is rife with antibiotics, though McGrath says those fears are also unfounded.

"Dairy farmers here in Western North Carolina are not giving their dairy cows antibiotics unless they're sick," she said. And if cows do have to be put on antibiotics, their milk can't be used.

"If they find traces of antibiotics in the milk, they will color it with food coloring and return it to the farmer to be dumped," she said. "It can't be used for human consumption."

In reality, our food supply is safe and so abundant we waste tons of it — a legitimate problem, McGrath said.

"Instead of celebrating (our food system), we have these people that are trying to create this fear in our food supply for no reason," she said.

For Barratt's part, she sees well-educated clients so confused, they don't even know what to eat.

"And I think when people are kept in confusion, that leads to profit," she said. "There's a concerned population, who are connecting the dots between their health and disease, and the profiteers see dollar signs."

The Food Babe, for example, profits from product endorsements. And Dr. Mehmet Oz has fallen under scrutiny by a group of physicians alleging conflicts of interest.

Health is a billion-dollar industry. But eating right can — and should — be easy, Barratt said.

"But just having a simple, basic message isn't too glamorous," she said. "If I'm just talking about eggplant, I might not get too many clicks."

# Community forum to show support for LGBT youth

BETH WALTON  
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ASHEVILLE — Youth Outright will highlight the experiences, hopes, dreams, aspirations and fears of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth at a community forum in mid-September.

The program will include spoken-word performances and excerpts from "Qtopia," a play developed as part of the Queer Youth Theatre Project that premiered in February at UNC Asheville.

Discussion will also center on organizations that serve LGBT youth, such as Youth Outright and school-based Gay Straight Alliances.

The event is chaired

by Anneliese Schombs-Fish and Suzanne Carlin, both local mothers of gay teenage boys. The women invite the public to attend the forum titled "Young Voices" so that "LGBTQ and allied youth in Western North Carolina know that they have many committed supporters who value them for who they are and want to make a positive difference in their lives."

"Young Voices" will be 8 to 9:30 p.m. Sept. 17 at the Asheville Jewish Community Center, 236 Charlotte St. Admission is \$30. Tickets will go on sale Aug. 17.

Purchases can be made by contacting Youth Outright at 828-772-1912 or info@youthoutright.org. Learn more at www.youthoutright.org.

# Authorities seeking man on sex-offense charges

STAFF REPORTS

ASHEVILLE — The Buncombe County Sheriff's Office is requesting the public's assistance locating an area man wanted on sex offense charges.

Jason Wright, 37, of Long Shoals Road in Arden, has been charged with three felony counts of indecent liberties with a child, sex offense with a child in the first degree, and rape in the first degree, a news release from Natalie Bai-



Jason Wright

ley of the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office said.

Wright is a black male, with black hair and brown eyes and several scars and tattoos. He is 5 feet 10 inches tall and 235 pounds.

Contact the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office at 828-250-6670 with any information.

# Teacher

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assembled in part by the Aim Higher Now NC education advocacy group, said assistants already have been laid off in a few districts, including those in Beaufort, Forsyth and Pitt counties, in light of the uncertainty and potential cuts. Other districts have alerted the assistants they could be dismissed.

"We are worried not only for ourselves and the income on which we depend, but for the teachers we work for and especially for the students we served," said William Johnston, president of the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants, working in the Bladen County Schools. He said he's one of 83 assistants who could lose their job in his district.

Assistants say they serve a key purpose in

the classrooms, working with students in need of academic help and helping teachers keep control in large classrooms. Many assistants also drive school buses.

"Once you cut my position and many other wonderful assistants' positions, please tell me who will perform these duties?" asked Erica Johnson, an Alamance-Burlington schools assistant.

House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, told reporters later Thursday that House Republicans "are solid" in negotiations on retaining funds for teacher assistant positions. He suggested giving even more flexibility than what's already provided in state law to school districts to spend money on assistants or teachers.

Senate Republicans favor investing more money in teacher positions, saying lower student-teacher ratios in early grades are the key to improved student performance.

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