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Cutting The Fat Or Cutting Corners? by Stef Bottinelli

22-07-2009



The University Of Western Ontario recently conducted a study in which they fed 200 mice of the same weight and size the same high fat diet for 18 months. The rodents were split in two groups: half were injected with naringenin, a flavonoid (i.e. a bioactive molecule) found in grapefruit (and, in lower doses, also in oranges and tomato skin) whilst the other half weren't. The study found that the mice injected with the molecule did not gain weight during the 18 months period, whilst the other half consistently got fatter and increased the lipid content in their bodies. The reason for this is because naringenin inhibits the liver's ability to store and process fat whilst speeding up its ability to metabolise sugar, stopping the body from storing excess lipids. Thus the researchers found that the flavonoid could help with slimming, obesity, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

The study has been conducted on rodents, so the actual effects that the flavonoid would have on human beings is still unknown, although the current finds are certainly giving us hope that it could have the same effects on us.



Grapefruit has been deemed a fat busting fruit for a long time and many diets have championed its benefits, best known of all its namesake, the grapefruit diet, a fat loss plan mainly based around protein, non starchy vegetables and, of course, grapefruit. Also the Scarsdale diet, that goes as far as referring to the citrus as having "magical powers". But before you rush out and stock up on grapefruit you must bear in mind a few facts. Naringenin is found in the white flesh of the fruit, sandwiched between the rind and the juicy segments, i.e. the bitter tasting part that nobody eats. Furthermore it would take a very high dosage of naringenin for it to have any effect whatsoever, so binging on grapefruit is not going to make you lose weight.

Indeed adding some grapefruit to your diet won't do any harm (although dentists would probably tell you that due to its acidity, in high doses, it could be corrosive to your teeth enamel), but we are still a long way away from finding the pill that will solve our weight problems.

If naringenin had exactly the same effect on human beings that it has on mice, obesity could be potentially wiped out. People could eat what they wanted and not get fat or run the risk of developing diabetes. If naringenin could be made in pill form and sold it would be a dream come true for many. It could give hope and a better life to those affected by obesity and diabetes, but mostly, I suspect, it would be attractive to anyone who wants to lose some weight, serial and yo-yo dieters and those who literally want to have their cake and eat it; in fact probably a very large percentage of the Western population. But would this magic pill pose a threat to other sides of our health? If people could take a pill that makes them slim, would they care about what types of food they put in their bodies? Would we stop eating fruit and vegetables, fish, pulses and all the other foods that are essential for our bodies to work well in favour of sugar and fat laden products that we seem to crave so much? Would we "de-educate" ourselves on what is good for us if "bad" foods didn't make us fat anymore? If chips didn't make us go up a size, would we choose to have broccoli instead?

As much as I'd like to stay trim for the rest of my life, I can't help but wonder why we always seem to want the unattainable when the attainable is in front of us but we refuse to acknowledge it. I know very few women who are happy with their bodies. Most, independently of their figures, would happily shed some weight. Everywhere we look there's a new diet, a new science, a new secret on how to lose weight. There are light, low sodium, low fat, low sugar and low carb foods screaming at us from every aisle of the supermarket, ads on TV and magazines and they all seem to scream: eat me I'm only a few calories! I contain no fat! Everything is available to us, yet in Europe we are all getting fatter at an alarming rate.

The problem is not that we don't have that magic pill yet, because we do already, the problem is that we refuse to acknowledge it. We know what we have to do, we've heard the secret to weight loss and well-being many times: eat healthily and do a little bit of exercise. For life. That's the secret that endless diets never seem to teach us. It's a lifelong commitment yes, but it's here and guess what? It works.

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