



June 13, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

Cold Water

There's an urban legend that's starting to circulate again that says drinking cold water equals cancer, or in some versions, it equals a heart attack. The reasoning is that it will turn the fats that you've eaten into sludge, they'll be absorbed faster in the intestine, and in some inexplicable way, lead to cancer. The version that someone sent to me added a statement about ice-cold Coke and burgers being bad for you (beyond the sugar and fat). The email then goes on to give some of the symptoms of a heart attack.

The symptoms of a heart attack are correct, but that's all that's correct. There's no evidence any of the rest of the email will happen, folks. While it takes a little time to bring cold fluids to body temperature after drinking, foods are processed by the acid in your stomach and digestive enzymes in your intestines—temperature has nothing to do with it. Theoretically, it could slightly slow down enzymatic action—they work best at body temperature—but that's offset by how fast you can drink ice-cold drinks. If we don't want our heads to hurt, they have to be sipped.

This is an urban legend that has now worked its way onto health blogs as legitimate. What's worse, thousands of people send it to thousands of others. Harmless misinformation? No; in addition to discouraging people from drinking enough fluids, it's a great way to collect email addresses and spread malware. Think about that before you hit "forward"; you wouldn't send your friends your cold and flu viruses, so avoid sending computer viruses as well.

If you have questions about health-related emails, ask me and I'll write about them because if you want to know, so will many others. Don't waste your time on them. The general rule is if something sounds too good—or too bad—to be true, it probably is.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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