



Finding the Truth I:

Reliable Nutrition and Health Information

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It's everywhere! Your hairdresser, grocery clerk, next-door neighbor, everyone has some nutrition breakthrough to share. It comes from the latest news release from a research institution, this month's men's and women's magazines, talk shows galore, "infomercials" and a multitude of Web sites. What's the truth and what's not?

Each year, billions of dollars are spent on worthless and sometimes potentially harmful nutrition and health advice. It comes in the form of magazines, books, treatments, supplements, gadgets, programs and special diets.

It is impossible to keep up with each new study, fad, fraud, cure, exposé, warning or hope that is being promoted or reported by someone. We can, however, build ourselves a box of tools to help us analyze these claims. It is best to have a plan for looking at information before it confronts us because all of us can be fooled some of the time. A preplan can give us a head start in making a rational decision. We can't count on others to protect us. Each of us needs to determine what makes sense and what doesn't.

Consider these points before making a decision or choice:

Yes or No?

1. Is a quick fix promised?

There are seldom quick, effortless or simple solutions to complicated medical problems.

2. Are doubts cast about current food or lifestyle practices?

A pitch that makes us feel guilty or inadequate needs to be questioned. Many worthless products are sold to make us look or feel younger, sexier or more popular. Question whether or not you need the product to make you healthier, or are there some other changes you could make for a healthier you? Often some

changes in our lifestyle, diet and exercise habits are the thing which could help us to feel better and more energetic, not some "special" product or food.

3. Does it sound too good to be true?

Be careful when a product is advertised as a "cure" for serious diseases such as cancer, heart disease or arthritis. Delaying medical treatment could have serious consequences. Be careful when a product is being sold for many different conditions. Some of the lists run the whole gamut of the body from migraine headaches to ingrown toenails, from fatigue to allergies.

4. Are simple conclusions drawn to complex studies?

Stories on new research findings frequently omit details that would enable you to judge how the study could relate to your own diet and nutritional needs.

5. Are recommendations based on a single study?

One study may not prove anything, but several studies, in which evidence accumulates bit by bit, can uncover the truth.

6. Are doubts cast about reputable scientific organizations?

It is important not to be made skeptical or fearful by implication. Facts which support or counter accusations should be sought.

7. Are lists of bad and good foods given?

Variety is not only the spice of life, it is the basis of a safe and healthy diet. Don't exclude foods or food groups. What you don't eat can affect your health, too. There is no miracle food or product and no forbidden food for healthy individuals. A vegetable such as broccoli has components which contribute to better health. That does not mean that "broccoli pills" are necessary or will provide the same benefits. Combinations of truth, misinformation and distorted logic are often difficult to sort out.

8. Is a product being sold as the solution to the problem?

Keep in mind that the seller may be more interested in your money than in your health. These people are usually very convincing and many of them are true believers in what they are selling.

9. Are studies reported in nonscientific sources referred to?

Publication in a peer-reviewed journal is a good indication that claims have been reviewed by an expert panel. Success based on testimonials and case studies do not prove the usefulness or safety of any product. (For example: Aunt Matilda was crippled with painful arthritis and cured with bee pollen and XYZ supplement.) Testimonials may be genuine, fabricated or even paid for. Listen to commercials. How often are products promoted with "doctors recommend" or "I use"? Who are these doctors, these I's? What does a "star" or "big name" endorsement really mean?

10. Are recommendations drawn from studies that ignore differences among individuals or groups?

Animals and people are different. Men and women are different. Also, age, economics, race and many other factors are important.

Each **Yes** answer raises a red flag. Dig a little deeper and look a little farther when the flags go up.

What do YOU think?

After reading this article, what sources of health advice would you now question?

What sources of reliable information are available at your agency?

Visit these Web sites for More Information

American Dietetic Association (ADA) provides information on nutrition and health.
www.eatright.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides health information on diseases, health risks and prevention guidelines. www.cdc.gov

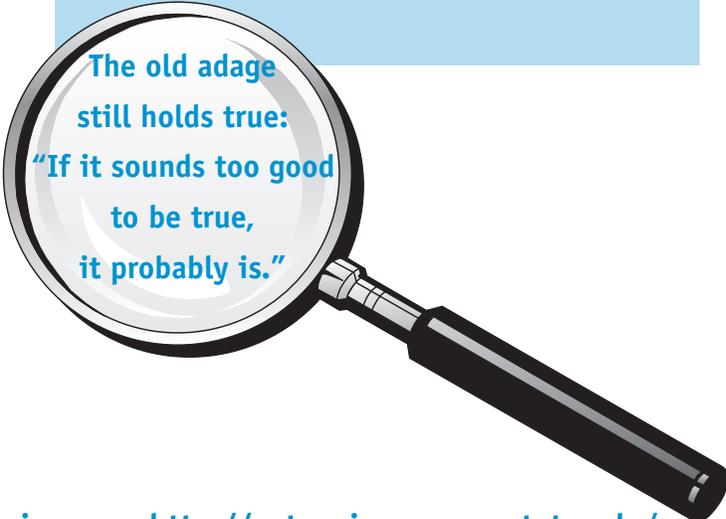
Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates food, drugs and oversees dietary supplements.
www.fda.gov

Federal Citizen Information Center provides consumer information on topics ranging from food/health to computers and cars.
www.pueblo.gsa.gov/

Healthfinder is a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gateway site provides links to reviewed resources on consumer health.
www.healthfinder.gov

Quackwatch is a nonprofit corporation that combats health-related fraud and myths.
www.quackwatch.org

OSU Extension Service has many online publications and links to reliable information sources.
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu>



The old adage still holds true:
"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

For more information on this and other topics, see: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/>