Ask Yourself

Some Questions

Ponder these questions as you explore nutrition and health information:

- Who is the author?
- What are the author’s credentials?
- Is a credible sponsoring institution identified?
- What is the purpose of the information?
- Is the site promoting or selling a particular product? (Commercial websites often end in “.com”)
- Is the information based on scientific research or opinion? (Government websites ending in “.gov” offer free information without commercial bias.)
- How current is the information? Is a date listed?
- Does the information have links to other sources of information? (This sometimes provides a clue to reliability, but not always. Anyone can link to another organization’s website.)
- Are the facts documented with sound scientific references? Or is the information solely based on personal testimonials?
- Does an editorial board oversee the content?
- Is the information well-written in terms of grammar and spelling? What is the tone of the writing? Does it take a balanced approach?

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

Health and Nutrition-related Websites to Explore

These websites offer free evidence-based information about health and wellness.

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: provides information on nutrition and health • www.eatright.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: provides health information on diseases, health risks and prevention guidelines • www.cdc.gov
- eXtension, a research-based online learning network with several resource areas • www.extension.org
- Food and Drug Administration: regulates food and 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: a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gateway site that provides links to reviewed resources on consumer health • www.healthfinder.gov
- U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans: Tips about healthful eating, which are updated based on current research every five years • www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines
- NDSU Extension Service: has many online publications and links to reliable information sources • www.ag.ndsu.edu/food

How to Sort Fact From Fiction

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What's the Harm, Anyway?

Misinformation and product scams can be harmful to people in a number of ways. Some of the more likely harmful results are:

- **Failure to seek needed medical care**
  Early and timely diagnosis and treatment of some conditions can be lifesaving.

- **Failure to continue essential treatment**
  You decide to take a supplement in place of your prescribed high-blood pressure medication.

- **Nutrient toxicities**
  Too much of essential nutrients, such as iron, can be harmful.

- **Undesirable nutrient-drug interactions**
  Example: Even though high doses of vitamin E may not be toxic, they can interfere with vitamin K action and enhance the effect of anticoagulant (blood-thinning) drugs.

- **Interference with sound nutrition practices**
  A balanced diet is basic to good health.

- **Wasted money**
  You've lost money that could be spent on healthful foods when you spend it on remedies and cures that do not work.

Trends in Health Information

When the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics conducted a “trends” survey in 2011, it found TV, magazines and the Internet were top information sources for nutrition and health, while health-care professionals, including physicians, dietitians and others with advanced training, were much less likely to be named.

A 2013 study by Macovsky Health and Kelton showed that the average U.S. consumer spends more than 50 hours looking for health information on the Internet but visits his or her health-care provider an average of three times per year.

How Do You Learn About Health?

Have any of these happened to you?

- While reading your favorite magazine, you notice an ad about a new diet supplement to melt pounds.
- A friend forwards an email pointing out the risks of a food additive.
- You hear a celebrity discussing a new diet on a radio or TV talk show.
- While flipping through channels, you pause on an infomercial about a life-changing fitness device, special diet or supplement.
- An ad appears in your mailbox for a new dietary supplement or diet food.
- You pick up a newsletter advertising a new health food or grocery store.
- While surfing the Web, you click on an ad for a website with a nutritional product for sale.
- Someone posts a message on Facebook about an amazing new vitamin supplement.

Health Information From Every Direction

We're all bombarded with information about nutrition and/or health in magazines and newspapers, and on TV and online through social media, blogs and YouTube videos. Also, family and friends might share information with us.

With all this information, how do we separate fact from fiction? What are the clues to reliable health information in today’s fast-paced world? This publication will help you sort through the vast amount of nutrition and health-related information that is available.