



Nutrition Quackery

Nutrition misinformation is all around us. It's impossible to turn on the TV, check email or sit down with a favorite magazine without being bombarded by quick-fix diet and supplement advice. While some of these recommendations may be based in sound science, many of them are playing on your emotions to try to make a quick buck. To help us evaluate the usefulness of all this information the Food and Nutrition Science Alliance has developed the following Ten Red Flags of Junk Science:

1. *Promises of a quick fix.* 'Quick fixes' are neither healthy, nor sustainable—positive lifestyle changes are required for a lasting effect.
2. *Extreme danger warnings from a single product or regimen.* While many products or plans are simply ineffective, some can be downright dangerous! The FDA is currently seeking recalls on many tainted diet products.
3. *Claims sounding too good to be true.* I know everyone has heard this before, but somehow the supplement market continues to grow, nearing \$30 billion annually, based largely on unsubstantiated claims.
4. *Simple conclusions drawn from a complex study.* Scientific research is very complex, and all-too-often results are taken entirely out of context.
5. *Recommendations based on a single study.* Researchers are not perfect, and many studies should be in agreement before they can lead to any solid recommendations.
6. *Dramatic statements that are not supported by reputable scientific organizations.* This is where the internet can work for you: before taking someone's advice take a look at their credentials, and see who they work for. Look for credentials like registered dietitian (RD), and individuals affiliated with accredited academic institutions.
7. *Lists of "good" and "bad" foods.* Most foods can be enjoyed in moderation, and even the best foods don't contain everything a body needs.
8. *Endorsements made to help sell a product.* Celebrity endorsements or client testimonials are the first sign that a product may be lacking real scientific support.
9. *Recommendations based on studies published without scientific review.* This is harder to spot, but looking at who is making the recommendations helps.
10. *Recommendations ignoring differences between individuals or groups.* While research is great for making general recommendations to a population, it is much more difficult to determine how an individual may be affected.

If you're questioning any diet advice you've seen or heard lately get in touch with a local registered dietitian (RD), your best source for unbiased, science-based nutrition information. Much of the information in this article can be found in the UW-Extension publication MP-121.2, entitled 'Nutrition Quackery'. For more information or for the full handout please stop by the Extension office or visit us on the web at <http://www.sheridancounty.com/info/coop/overview.php>. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*