Deciphering Nutrition Misinformation

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Nutrition misinformation is the leading example of health fraud.

This is a result of misleading health claims for food and nutrition products. These can include traditional foods, dietary supplements, dietary foods, food substances, diet plans, and devices.

Food “faddism” fuels this type of fraud.
Food fads are based on 3 basic misbelieves:

1. Certain foods have special attributes which may cure disease
2. Certain foods should be removed the diet because they are harmful
3. Certain foods have special health benefits
Negative Effects of Nutrition Fraud

- Loss of $$
  - = lack of money for proper help
- Failure to seek proper medical help
- Substituting poor nutritional practices for sound ones
- Disease itself!
How much weight would you like to lose?

- 10 lbs in just 7 Days!
- 25 lbs in just 17 Days!
- 50 lbs in just 30 Days!
- 75 lbs in just 42 Days!
- 150 lbs in just 88 Days!

TOP SECRET
FAT LOSS SECRET

Carb Blocker Fat Blocker
Eat What You Like When You Like

Free Bottles
Order Now Online $100 Saving for a limited time

POUNDS AWAY!
with HOODIA CHÁ DE BUGRE MANGOSTEEN GREEN TEA
Fortified with L-CARNITINE
Liquid Weight Loss Program

Winner of the Ms. National Fitness USA Product Of The Year Award

"You no longer have to be a member of the elite Hollywood actor crowd or be a professional fitness champion to have access to HGH therapy. Now anyone can literally see an 82% improvement in body fat with GrowLean15 for about the cost of a cup of coffee per day!"

- Tatiana Anderson / Ms. National Fitness USA
“A smart buyer doesn’t confuse the e-mail spammers making egregious claims with the legitimate dietary supplement industry any more than they would confuse the spammers claiming to give away cars with the legitimate automotive industry.”

Daniel Fabricant, PhD, vice president of scientific affairs at the Natural Products Association
Objectives

- Discuss the prevalence of false advertising and its implications
- Identify and differentiate between claim types
- Understand the regulation (or lack thereof) of the industry
- Learn how to spot a false claim
- Test your knowledge!
Who’s Buying? – *Everyone!*

- Consumers spend over $20 B on dietary supplements
- 40% of the US population uses dietary supplements often
- 50% of people have used herbal remedies
- 34% of consumers looking to lose weight first turn to a dietary supplement as their adjunct in the battle against obesity.

Office of Dietary Supplements
NEJM 1993;328:246-52.
In a perfect world:

- We would all eat our 4-6 servings of fruits and veggies per day.
- We would exercise 60+ minutes per day.
- We would be at our ideal weight and feel energized all day.
- We wouldn’t have diseases or get sick.
Targets for False Advertising

- Overweight

- Serious health conditions that have no cure
  - Multiple sclerosis
  - Diabetes
  - Alzheimer’s disease
  - Cancer
  - HIV and AIDS
  - Arthritis
Perception of the Supplement Industry

- A federal ban on ephedra and a Presidential mandate to outlaw steroids are just a few of the measures impacting the supplement industry.
- Mandatory reporting of adverse events.
- Raises concerns among some industry and consumer groups.
Regulation of Supplements

- DSHA (Dietary Supplement Health Education Act) in 1994
- Defined “Supplements”
- Regulated by the FDA, but differently than other food & drugs
  - Dietary supplements (properly defined) are, after all, components of, or compounds found in foods
- “This statement has not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.”
Regulation of Supplements

Whatever their form may be, DSHEA places dietary supplements in a special category under the general umbrella of "foods," not drugs, and requires that every supplement be labeled a dietary supplement.
Three Types of Claims
What & How

- Health Claim
- Nutrient Content Claim
- Structure / Function Claim
Health Claim

• Describe the relationship between food, food component, or dietary supplement ingredient and reducing risk of a disease or health related condition

“Now, foods containing any level of EPA and DHA, which meet the qualifying criteria, are able to carry the claim:

"Supportive but not conclusive research shows that consumption of EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. One serving of [name of food] provides [X] grams of EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids. [See nutrition information for total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol content.]"
Nutrient Content Claim

- Relative amount of a nutrient or dietary substance in a product.

Good source of choline. Contains 55 mg of choline per serving, which is 10% of the Daily Value for choline (550 mg)."
Structure / Function Claim

- A statement about how a product may affect the organs or systems of the body without mentioning a specific disease*.

“Product B promotes healthy joints and bones”

*Not subject to FDA review and authorization
Of course it’s safe, it’s on the market right?

Wrong!

- Dietary supplement makers do not have to provide the FDA with evidence that dietary supplements are effective OR safe.
Safety Concerns

- Medication Interactions
  - St. John’s Wort
  - Willow Bark
  - Meadowsweet
  - Chamomile
  - Grapefruit juice

- Dosage
  - High amounts of some vitamins and minerals or other substances can be toxic
Other Substances with Safety Concerns

- Comfrey
- Chaparral
- Kava
- Ephedra (ma huang)
- L-tryptophan
- Lobelia
- Germander
- Aristolochic Acid
How to Spot False Claims

- Too good to be true?
  - Cure-all for a wide variety of ailments
  - Can treat or cure diseases
  - Limited availability (*Hurry!*)

- Undocumented case histories or testimonials

- No risk / Money-back guarantee

- Impressive sounding terms – “hunger stimulation point”

- Melts away fat
How to Spot False Claims Continued…

- Consider the source (do they provide contact info)
  - .gov  www.mypyramid.gov
  - .edu  www.psu.edu
  - .org  www.eatright.org
  - .com  www.webmd.com

- gov=gov’t organization
- edu=educational institute
- org=non-profit
- com=for profit

The MyPyramid symbol represents the recommended proportion of foods from each food group and focuses on the importance of making smart food choices in every food group, every day. Physical activity is a new element in the symbol.

The new food guidance system utilizes interactive technology found on the USDA MyPyramid Web site (link below). The interactive activities make it easy for individuals to enter their age, gender and physical activity level to obtain a more personalized recommendation on their daily calorie level based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. The Web site features MyPyramid Plan, MyPyramid Tracker and Inside MyPyramid, plus tips, resources and a worksheet.

A child-friendly version of MyPyramid for teachers and children has been developed for children six to 11 years old. More information can be found at MyPyramid for Kids Web site (link below).

Visit MyPyramid Resources (link below) to purchase a variety of MyPyramid products.
How to Spot False Claims Continued...

- Know the website or advertisement’s purpose
  - .com example

![Advertisement](image-url)
How to Spot False Claims Continued…

- Check the date, is it current?

  http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/default.htm

  http://www.consumerlab.com/
  stays very current

  Gives a “last modified” date
How to Spot False Claims
Continued…

- Know the target audience
  - In conjunction w/NIH & USDHHS

Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight-loss Program

Choosing a weight-loss program may be a difficult task. You may not know what to look for in a weight-loss program or what questions to ask. This...
How to Spot False Claims Continued…

- Visit a health professional
Test Your Supplement Savvy

1. A supplement labeled “natural” means that it also is:

A. Mild

B. Without any risk of side effects

C. Safe to use with other medications

D. None of the above

From www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/health/hea09.shtm
2. Since dietary supplements are so easily available – and don’t require a doctor’s prescription – they are much safer than drug products and can be used as self treatment for illnesses without a health professional’s supervision.

Test Your Supplement Savvy

True  False
3. Testimonials in dietary supplement promotions give a good idea of the supplement's benefits and safety because they are based on firsthand accounts.

True False
4. Many supplements have proven health benefits?

True  False
5. Before you start taking a dietary supplement, talk it over with a knowledgeable person like:

A. You Doctor or health professional
B. Your pharmacist
C. A supplement sales person
D. A friend who takes them
E. None of the above
Reliable Online Resources

- www.consumerlab.com
  - Posts recalls and warnings

- www.herbalgram.org
  - American Botanical Council

- www.eatright.org
  - American Dietetic Association

- www.mypyramid.gov
Reliable Online Resources

- [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)  
  By the DHHS

- [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)  
  NIH’s National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

- [www.vm.cfsan.fda.gov](http://www.vm.cfsan.fda.gov)  
  Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition

- [www.fda.gov/opacom/laws/dshea](http://www.fda.gov/opacom/laws/dshea)  
  Dietary Supplement Health & Education Act of 1994. FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
Reliable Online Resources

- [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)
  - American Diabetes Association

- [Deliciousdecision.org](http://Deliciousdecision.org)
  - From the American Diabetes Association