

Health Coaching

Searching For The Truth

(This handout is from the "Nutrition 4 Optimal Health" Course by Angela Poch)

Fact, Fiction, or ?

There is an increasing concern over the prolific confusion of information since the dawn of the internet super-highway. Type in just about anything and you will get pages of seemingly conflicting information on that same subject. Opinions can be based on theories founded in science and quite logical, but they are still just opinions until proven by scientific studies. In addition, interpretation of science or the way the experiment, or study, was done can change as more data comes to light. Studies can also be flawed in many ways and when retested new evidence is revealed. In reality, it is impossible to control all variables when doing research on humans.

How do you know what to choose and who to believe when it comes to health? Many just take an 'experts' word for it, or worse yet some book toting a cure all. Doctors and authors, yes, even myself, are still human. We DO make mistakes. You certainly can't empirically trust Google or Wikipedia or even ONE single health professional so what do you do? So let's look at a few ways to make sure you are getting the truth. It is not hard, but it does take a little time. For the quick and dirty - look at Red Flags of Quackery on page 3.

Conflicting info

So, what about "health" controversies or conflicting info: Like hundreds of blogs saying soy is bad for you or canola oil, chocolate or whether or not to take vitamins. We need to turn to the source of information. Science. But first we have to understand something about health principles, logic, and research. The health principle I'm referring to is: What may be harmful to one person may not be for another. This is NOT because the principles change, but because we are created different and we have different DNA. Some people are allergic to soy and when they quit eating it they are so happy they write a blog on how much better they feel not eating it.

Before I get into the steps in researching health, you may think "can't you just turn to a qualified scientist or nutritionist who has all ready done the research for you". Yes, of course, but.... who do you choose to believe? A dietitian you just met, your family doctor with no nutritional training, a famous Doctor on TV? We can find professional do not always agree. Often we just believe the one we want to believe. Ok, I know most of us would never admit to something so shallow, but unfortunately it is very true. If at this point you are willing to just take the experts opinion that is fine, not everyone can do mountains of research. There is nothing wrong with reading a good book and making changes in your life based on that book. BUT remember that is your choice to listen to a particular doctor. You can't tell others to choose the same, because Dr so and so says so. I do recommend you at least read the RED FLAG section on page 3.

So, for those of you who want to know for yourself the answer to a health question, like 'should we take vitamin supplements' or 'is soy bad', you will have to do research yourself.

7 Steps How to Research Health

1. Collect many sources for information. Books, internet, calling professionals, etc.

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2. Be sure the sources are qualified. There are hundreds of people discussing thousands of topics, but they are just giving their opinions, stories, history, and suggestions. Your source needs to be an unbiased qualified professional. That means a neurosurgeon saying you should take Vitamin D to prevent osteoporosis is not as valuable as a Orthopedic surgeon saying the same thing. Medical Doctors are not trained in depth on nutrition, so just be careful. Sometimes scientists or even research students are a much better source. So, check: Is this an actual study or a quote from a study? Is it the original study or an interpretation of the study. Was the study done by someone in that field or at least for a significant amount of time. Was it a 'blind' study or just a compilation of a Dr.'s many patience testimonies? Well that leads us to point #2.

3. Be sure the source is unbiased. This can be more difficult. I did research on caffeine and found a seemingly good source saying it is NOT a diuretic and several Dieticians and Doctors quote the study. So I went to the source. It turns out it was a VERY small study funded by cola-cola. Which brings us to another principle of research, look for more than one source. BUT also consider LOOKING outside your particular country for material as well. The pharmaceutical companies have a very tight grip in the USA in treatment, legislation, and research. The documentary "Hot Coffee" is a real eye opener in regards to how money talks.

4. Look for more than one source, I aim for 5 (but at least 3), and be willing to look back on the subject in the future. If you can only find one source, that is simply not enough. Keep looking and praying for the answer and don't give up. For a long time snacking was promoted but current research is saying our stomach needs a break and grazing is not the best for us. Those who like to graze, continue sharing the old research.

5. Be sure you have the original source, and that your 3 different sources are really different. We might find 10 people saying you can't overdose on vitamin B12, but if you trace them back they point to one article. While several other different articles/studies say you can overdose. Make sure you are at the source! This may take some digging. Don't quote an article unless you are sure it is the original source or is directly word for word quoting the source. (I've seen many, health professionals on the internet and in person quote a study, only to find out they quoted the 'findings' of the study which were skewed.)

6. Be sure you have the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Make sure you take the source in context. If you find an article that says "You can live just fine for 2 days without water" check out the whole story! Perhaps it is an article on surviving on a deserted island and it is a tip for staying calm and giving hope. Stay in context. Learn why was the study done and what is the main thrust of the article.

7. Take the average, leave the extremes - use common sense. If one study or source says you don't need vitamin D and another says it cures everything, you can be sure neither is correct. Find the mainstream, common sense, average information, and omit the extreme fanatics. Even if there is a possibility they are correct, you are better off with certainties in research. In fact, I often judge health by results, I check out what the centenarians are doing. If MOST centenarians - people who live past 100, as a rule eat it or do it regularly, it is likely safe. (And get this two major groups of centenarians, Okinawans and Adventists, eat soy!) Case in point, how can soy be so harmful if, according to several studies including Harvard and National Geographic, 1000's of people living life to its fullest eat soy? Doesn't add up.

Red Flags of Quackery

A quack is a "fraudulent or ignorant pretender to medical skill" or "a person who pretends, professionally or publicly, to have skill, knowledge, or qualifications he or she does not possess; a charlatan or snake oil salesman".

The term quack is a clipped form of the archaic term quacksalver, from Dutch: kwakzalver a “hawker of salve”. In the Middle Ages the term quack meant “shouting”. The quacksalvers sold their wares on the market shouting in a loud voice.

Some red flags that mean you should dig a bit deeper into a claim (for an herb, oil, product, food, etc.):

- Satisfaction Guaranteed
- Quick & Easy
- Natural
- One Stop ...
- Time Tested
- Accusations of ___ (research, doctors, professions, organizations, etc.) Paranoia.
- Top Ten Foods that Make You ____
- Testimonies
- Meaningless Jargon

Satisfaction Guaranteed - Marketers may make generous promises thus leading you to believe “it must be true” but most customers won’t even bother with a refund so they are “playing the odds.”

Quick & Easy - Even proven treatments are not quick and easy. Taking a pill can have serious side effects even if it says all natural. Speaking of “all natural”.

Natural - Just because it’s natural doesn’t make it effective or even safe. Arsenic is all natural but deadly. Any product that is truly powerful enough to help a medical condition can most likely be over done and even harmful if not taken properly. IE: Many essential oils can burn the eyes or even the skin if used improperly and if they are truly therapeutic grade. Now, that doesn’t mean all natural isn’t good, just be aware marketers use this language to make you think it is either safe or effective or both.

One Stop ... or Cure All - How many of you have heard all the benefits of eating a banana. Well, it’s likely most of them are true to some degree, but decreasing the risk of a disease or even treating a disease is not a cure. The word cure is a very special word used sparingly by sincere professionals and loosely by those who want to convince you of something. No one product or food can possibly treat everything for everybody.

Time Tested/Proven - If it is, then just type it into Google and you should find a few studies to back it up. I’ve done this and really found some things true I was surprised about. Like I said, just because one of these phrases is used doesn’t mean it’s false or misleading, just that you should look deeper at the advice, product, or claim. Old wives tales are still being used to this very ‘enlightened’ day.

Accusations of ___ (research, doctors, professions, organizations, etc.) Paranoia - Trying to mud sling is one way of taking your eyes off the truth they don’t want you to see. Any company, unless they are a registered charity, selling anything is it in for the money regardless of what they say. They may care about other things as well, but profit is important or they would be a non-profit business. And even non-profits are not excused from accusing other companies falsely. The tobacco companies did major slander campaigns and there are others doing the same. Believe it or not much of the harmful facts on fat we have are because the sugar industry paid for that research. This doesn’t mean the facts are false only they don’t want you looking closely elsewhere. Pro-vaccine vs anti-vaccine proponents are a prime example of this. Also, fear mongering is a tactic used to get you hooked. We want to play it safe, so if something is said to be harmful, and we don’t have the time to research it, we often just avoid it. This is not a good idea. **RED FLAG** if a food is said to be bad for everyone but no mainstream health professionals are backing it up.

Top Ten Foods that ____ - Fill in the blank: burn fat, increase metabolism, you should never eat, and so on. Hey, I've used some terms like these too: 3 Key Steps, and Top 10 Foods For. BUT remember to read all with caution. So many blogs and books rely on the fact you are so desperate to 'fix' your problem you'll read and believe it, even if just in part. They make money just if you click to read more, then they use jargon and scare tactics or promises to hook you more.

Testimonies & Anecdotal Evidence - Hearsay, stories, testimonies. These many very well be true but you may be misled by listening. Collected in a casual or informal manner it relies on personal testimony. When compared to other types of evidence, anecdotal evidence is generally regarded as limited in value due to a number of potential weaknesses, but may be considered within the scope of scientific method as some anecdotal evidence can be both empirical and verifiable, e.g. in the use of case studies in medicine. This is a consequence of the informal way the information is gathered, documented, presented, or any combination of the three. The term is often used to describe evidence for which there is an absence of documentation, leaving verification dependent on the credibility of the party presenting the evidence. So, we don't dismiss testimonies, but we can't be sure of the real impact the claim truly has.

Meaningless Medical or Health Jargon or Hype - Phony terms hide the lack of scientific proof. Example: "Beats the hunger stimulation point (HSP)" 5 Metabolic Body Types - learn yours today! and so on.

To summarize, here is the basic rule of thumb in 2 points:

1. Use REAL science. Find the dates - how old is it, Did they sample over 100 people, and Who oversaw/paid for the research? Look for actual studies, not people who quote the studies. Avoid testimonies or anecdotal evidence or logic without research. Many are motivated by their own agenda, well intentioned, but biased. Once, I spend weeks researching a statement I found. It appeared in many medical blogs but turned out to be false once I got to the source. The source has been mis-quoted and all the other 'professionals' just referenced the mis-quote. So just because Google comes back with a couple hundred blogs and websites say soy is bad that is not evidence. Make sure you are reading REAL documents and not interpretations.

2. If MOST Centenarians – people who live past 100 in active, healthy lifestyles, as a rule eat it or do it (or NOT do it) regularly, it is likely worth looking into.