Fact Versus Fiction: Determining If What You Are Reading About Nutrition Is True

Jamie I. Baum
Associate Professor -
Food Science

Angela Tacinelli
Senior Graduate Assistant
Nutrition/Food Science

*Arkansas Is
Our Campus*

Navigating Nutrition

It seems everywhere we look there is new information about what food may be best for our health. From the "good" foods encouraged for consumption and the "bad" foods identified to avoid, or possible new diet trends to follow, nutritional information can quickly become overwhelming. Add in the large amount of resources available to get the information we want, it can be even more difficult to know who to trust and who not to trust for accurate nutrition advice. We are often told not to believe everything we hear (or read), but it is not always easy to determine when this applies, especially when it comes to a topic as important as our nutrition. The biggest challenge is recognizing who or what is, or is not, a reliable source. Luckily there are tips you can follow to help guide you through all of the diet trends or weight loss sources to better understand what is fact versus fiction when it comes to your nutrition.

Tip #1: Be Smart About Your Internet Search

As easy as it may be to do a quick search for your nutrition-related topic on the internet, not everything you read on the internet is true. It is important to always read beyond the title. One way to avoid general or biased results from blogging or tabloid websites is to use a free scholarly search engine such as Google Scholar [1] or PubMed [2]. These search engines will exclude sources such as magazines, blogs and news outlets from the results and will include results from scientific resources instead. However, if you do plan to use a general Google search for quick information, validate the information by looking into the original sources used by the author. This information can usually be found hyperlinked at the end of the article or stated just below the title of the article. If the article does not use references, you probably can't rely on the information being accurate.

Tip #2: Use Credible, Research-Based Websites

Google Scholar is a useful tool for sorting through an abundance of social resources because not all websites are scientifically or governmentally reviewed. However, when navigating websites, a good indicator can be the domain used at the end of its URL. Reliable websites that have been scientifically or governmentally reviewed often include domains such as ".edu" , ".org", and ".gov". PubMed [2] is a database containing access to biomedical literature. USDA.gov [3] is a website monitored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that provides information on a wide range of public policy and scientific topics, including food and nutrition [4] and what it means to be organic [5]. In addition, American Society of Nutrition, ASN [6], provides access to the latest scientific knowledge in animal and human nutrition through publication announcements, continuing education opportunities such as free webinars [7], and a nutrition blog written by experts and students directly in the field [8]. Lastly, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, AND, offers to the public nutrition information to the public

such as articles, videos, recipes and help in finding a qualified registered dietitian [9].

Tip #3: Not Everyone on Social Media Is Your Nutrition Friend

The network of social media has grown significantly and, as a result so has the number of account users. Among them are accounts relating to the field of nutrition, including food companies, lifestyle bloggers, self-taught nutritionists and life coaches. While these accounts may easily catch your attention, it is important to note that they do not always have the necessary educational background to provide accurate nutritional recommendations. Often these accounts or individuals are sponsored to promote specific products or diet trends via advertisement posts on their accounts. This can result in to misleading and biased information being shared. Social media applications will often use a blue check mark, also known as a verified badge, after an account's name if they have validated credentials or resources for providing information on their account (i.e., doctors, scientific societies, government-sponsored organizations) [10].

Tip #4: Only Trust Licensed Professionals

A validated source does not always mean that it a trusted source for the information you are seeking. It is recommended to only trust licensed professionals including doctors, scientists, dietitians and those in academia. Licensed professionals may have credentials such as M.D. (doctor of medicine), Ph.D. (doctor of philosophy), or R.D. (registered dietitian). A credential demonstrates that individual has sufficient educational background, expertise and/or in-depth knowledge about a nutrition topic.

Final Food for Thought

The internet can be a great resource for staying up to date on the latest nutrition information, but it is important to know which sources are best for getting accurate and reliable information from trusted nutrition experts.

References

1. Google Scholar, Google Scholar, https://scholar.google.com/ (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
2. PubMed, U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/ (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
3. USDA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, https://www.usda.gov/ (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
4. Food and Nutrition, USDA, https://www.usda.gov/topics/food-and-nutrition (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
5. USDA Organic, USDA, https://www.usda.gov/topics/organic. (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
6. About ASN, American Society for Nutrition, https://nutrition.org/about-asn/ (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
7. Continuing Education Opportunities, American Society for Nutrition, https://nutrition.org/meetings/continuing-education/ (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
8. ASN Blog, American Society of Nutrition, https://nutrition.org/asn-blog/ (Accessed: 9.10.2018)
9. Eat Right, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, https://www.eatright.org/ (Accessed: 10.03.2018)
10. Verified Badge, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verified_badge (Accessed: 9.10.2018)