

Quick Facts

- ⤴ Food fads, fad diets, health fraud, and misdirected health claims are all types of nutrition misinformation.
- ⤴ A nutrition expert is known as a registered dietitian (RD) or a licensed dietitian (LD), and has a specialized degree in dietetics, nutrition, public health, or related sciences.
- ⤴ Do not rely on manufacturer claims when determining if a product is safe. Instead, seek out unbiased science-based research.
- ⤴ Consult a medical professional with questions about dietary supplements including vitamins, minerals, herbs and botanicals.

Top Ten Red Flags

- ⤴ Recommendations that promise a quick fix.
- ⤴ Dire warnings of danger from a single product or regimen.
- ⤴ Claims that sound too good to be true.
- ⤴ Simplistic conclusions drawn from a complex study.
- ⤴ Recommendations based on a single study.
- ⤴ Dramatic statements that are refuted by reputable scientific organizations.
- ⤴ Lists of "good" and "bad" foods.
- ⤴ "Spinning" information from another product to match the producer's claims.
- ⤴ Stating that research is "currently underway," indicating that there is no current research.
- ⤴ Non-science based testimonials supporting the product, often from celebrities or highly satisfied customers.

Problems within the industry that aid in the promotion of fraudulent nutrition claims include:

- ⤴ Limited enforcement of laws and regulations that prevent a producer from labeling and selling a product under the term "dietary supplement."
- ⤴ Individuals identifying themselves as nutritionists who have dubious credentials from non-accredited schools.
- ⤴ Research scientists who go public with their findings before their study has been published in a scientific journal or duplicated, resulting in consumer confusion.

Who Are the Nutrition Experts?

A qualified nutrition expert is known as a registered dietitian (RD) or a licensed dietitian (LD), and has specialized degree in dietetics, nutrition, public health, or related sciences from an accredited university. These individuals may also hold advanced degrees such as M.S., M.Ed., Sc.D., M.D. or Ph.D., and must undergo continuing education on a regular basis. On the other hand, the terms "nutritionist" and "diet counselor," are not regulated and may be used by self-proclaimed experts without proper qualifications.

Summary: How Can You Protect Yourself?

The best way to protect against questionable health products and services is to be an informed consumer. The following list of claims and themes are common with nutrition misinformation, and may help consumers evaluate questionable advertising and sales techniques:

- ⤴ Does the seller promise immediate, effortless or guaranteed results?
- ⤴ Does the advertisement contain words like "break-through," "miracle," "special" or "secret"? These are used to appeal to your emotions and are not scientific or medical words.
- ⤴ Is the product or service a "secret remedy" or a recent discovery that cannot be found anywhere else?
- ⤴ Is the product recommended for stress, or being promoted as "natural," claiming it will help "detoxify," "revitalize" and "purify" your body?
- ⤴ Does the manufacturer claim that the product is effective for a wide variety of ailments, or a "cure all"? The broader the claims, the less likely they are to be true.
- ⤴ Do the promoters offer testimonials or case histories of patients who have been "cured"?
- ⤴ Are vitamin and mineral dose recommendations greater than the Dietary Reference Intake (DRI)? Reliable sources will make only recommendations that are in line with the DRIs.
- ⤴ Is the product being sold by a self-proclaimed "health advisor"? Insist on identification and professional credentials that are nationally accredited and recognized, such as a registered dietitian (RD).
- ⤴ Does the sponsor claim to have a cure for a disease (like arthritis or cancer) which is not yet understood by medical sources?
- ⤴ Do the promoters use guilt or fear to sell the product?
- ⤴ Does the advertisement claim Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval? It is illegal to suggest FDA approval as a part of any marketing claim. However, all medical products sold across state lines must be registered with the FDA. Ask for the FDA proof of product listing if in doubt.
- ⤴ Do the producers claim that the product is available in limited quantities and recommend the consumer pay in advance?
- ⤴ Is there promise of a "money-back guarantee"?

