

Healthy Living: Clues of Quackery

Provided by your Neighborly Care Network Dietitian

How Common is Quackery?

Health fraud – faddism or quackery – is a multimillion dollar business in the United States. Always deliberate and done for gain, older people are often targets. Avoid being a victim. Evaluate nutrition and health information, as well as recommendations, before taking action based on them.

What is ...

Food Faddism: *a practice based on an exaggerated belief in the health benefits of certain foods*

Quackery: *promotion of certain practices, with misleading health claims, for profit*

Are There Clues to Help Me Recognize Quackery?

Yes! Here are six key questions to ask about nutrition and health information. The answers will give you **CLUES** to help you spot quackery.

1. Is the author/speaker qualified to provide nutrition or health information? Check to be sure they have a nutrition or medical degree. If they don't, that's **CLUE #1**. Dietitians (RD or LD/N) and nutritionists with advanced degrees have training in nutrition. Doctors (MD) are health experts. Be aware that "Dr." in front of their name could mean they have a Ph.D. in math!

2. Are claims based only on testimonials, especially by famous persons? Information from persons who lack formal nutrition or health education, like TV personalities or professional athletes, may not be reliable.

3. Is the claim supported by more than one scientific study? Claims must be supported by scientific studies. Specific information about the studies should be provided. If it's not, that's another **CLUE** of quackery.

4. Who tested the product or conducted the research? A reliable organization does not sell any product that it is studying. Good studies are most often done by government health agencies, colleges, universities, or medical schools. If claims made are not supported by the medical community and/or government agencies, that's a **CLUE** for possible quackery!

5. Does it sound too good to be true? Quick and painless ... "natural" ... can cure a variety of conditions ... is based on an ancient remedy ... is a "miracle" cure or breakthrough. Claims like these make products sound "too good to be true" – a strong **CLUE** for quackery.

6. Is elimination of one or more food groups recommended? This could be a big **CLUE**. For good health, we need a variety of nutrients. We get these nutrients from foods we eat. Foods from different food groups give us different nutrients. If you eliminate entire food groups from your diet, you may develop health problems.

For a good source of information: Contact a registered or state licensed dietitian (RD or LD/N), your county Extension office, or your Area Agency on Aging. Check your telephone book for listings.