

Nutrition News

Information for Senior Citizens

Developed by Colorado State University Extension
Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition

Quackery ... don't be a sitting duck!

Quackery has come a long way from the days when salesmen traveled from town to town, peddling medicines that promised everything from building muscles to hair growth. Today, quacks are more sophisticated. They hide behind fake degrees, calling themselves “doctors” and “nutritionists.” It has been estimated that Americans spend 25 to 30 billion dollars every year on “alternative medicine.” The information in this newsletter will help you identify quacks and understand the harm they can do.

Books and pamphlets regarding health and nutrition can be written by anyone calling themselves “doctors” or “nutritionists.” These books and pamphlets may present inaccurate and false information. In addition to publishing misleading information, quacks may promote dietary supplements that make numerous unproven health claims. Unfortunately, the Food and Drug Administration cannot restrict the selling of products sold as “dietary supplements.”

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How to Spot a Quack

In this day and age, it is difficult to know who is a legitimate health professional and who is not. Here are a few quick tips to help you spot a quack.



- Belittles recognized treatments. Quacks will belittle modern medicine in order to undermine the person's trust in the medical establishment.
- Relies on testimonials. Instead of basing their information on facts from reputable journals and other sources, quacks rely on stories from current users of the treatment.
- Discourages consultation with other doctors.
- Offers a quick cure.
- Professes to have a “secret cure” or “magic formula.”
- Claims that the product cures many diseases or disorders or has multiple health benefits.

Before allowing yourself to be taken in, trust yourself. If you feel that the person is making claims that are too good to be true, they probably are. Every treatment has some risk. If someone states that there are no risks, that should be a red flag to you. Be sure to check the credentials of your sources. Is he/she a qualified professional? Does he/she stand to gain financially?

Questions and Answers



Q: What can I do if I have been a victim of quackery?

A: If you have been a victim of quackery, there are several steps you can take to prevent it from happening to someone else:

1. Notify your doctor. You and your doctor can file a complaint with the Food and Drug Administration's MedWatch at 1-800-332-1088.
2. Notify your local or state consumer affairs office or the state Attorney General to file a complaint against an unlicensed practitioner.
3. Contact your local Postal Inspector for products ordered through the mail.
4. Contact the Federal Trade Commission and the Council of Better Business Bureaus for advertisements that you feel are false or misleading.

Q: Where can I find reliable information?

A: Below is a list of organizations that can provide you will reputable information.

Government

- Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (U.S. DHHS)
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Volunteer Health Agencies

- American Cancer Society
- American Diabetes Association
- American Heart Association

Reputable Consumer Groups

- Better Business Bureau
- Consumers Union
- American Council on Science & Health
- National Council Against Health Fraud

Professional Health Organizations

- American Dietetic Association*
- Society for Nutrition Education
- American Medical Association

Colorado State University

- Fact Sheet 9.350 *Nutrition Quackery*: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/foodnut/09350.html>.

- *ADA has a position paper on Food and Nutrition Misinformation at www.eatright.org/Member/PolicyInitiatives/index_21044.cfm.
- Evaluating Online Health Information (Food and Nutrition Information Center): Resources to help consumers evaluate websites to determine if accurate information is provided: www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/consumersite/hot-online.htm.
- *Quackwatch*SM: a member of Consumer Federation of America, is a nonprofit corporation whose purpose is to combat health-related frauds, myths, fads, and fallacies: www.quackwatch.org/.
- The National Council Against Health Fraud: NCAHF is a private nonprofit, voluntary health agency that focuses on health misinformation, fraud, and quackery as public health problems: www.ncahf.org/.
- Red Flag Bogus Weight Loss Claims (Federal Trade Commission): The "Red Flag" education campaign assists media outlets voluntarily to screen out deceptive weight-loss product advertisements: www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/redflag/index.html.

CHART OF SHAME

Treatment	Description	Claims	Harm
<i>Aromatherapy</i>	aromatic plant oils which are inhaled, applied to the skin, or ingested	used to treat a variety of illness	not proven, can be costly
<i>Bee pollen</i>	mixture of bee saliva, plant nectar, and pollen	used to treat obesity, high blood pressure, rheumatism	not proven, can be costly
<i>Crystal healing</i>	crystals worn on various parts of the body	used to treat a variety of illnesses	not proven, can be costly
<i>Live cell analysis</i>	blood is analyzed	used to diagnose unhealthy cells, in which case, enzyme pills are taken (\$100+)	unreliable, not proven, very costly
<i>Manchurian mushroom (also known as kombucha tea)</i>	not a mushroom, but a colony of yeast and bacteria	used to prevent cancer, cure AIDS & diabetes, prevent hair loss, help with digestion, increase fat burning, treat cataracts	not proven, very costly (\$50 per mushroom), can become contaminated with a toxic mold, aspergillus
<i>Chelation therapy</i>	a substance is infused into the body	used for treating cardiovascular disease and diabetic foot ulcers	not proven, can cause dangerous allergic reactions and calcium depletion

More Unproven Health Claims

Scientists have the burden of proving any claim they make. However, quacks have the luxury of making any claim without proving what they are saying is true. The following are examples of unproven health claims that are being promoted by quacks.

Anti-aging supplements

- bee pollen
- garlic
- gotu kola
- pangamic acid (vitamin B-15)
- RNA pills
- selenium pills
- vitamin E pills

Arthritis treatments

- vinegar and honey
- 7 gin-soaked white raisins every day
- aloe vera
- nightshades diet (eliminates potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, tobacco)
- poke root
- snake venom
- vitamin E
- Juice Plus (capsules of dried powders of juiced fruits/vegetables)



The Final Word . . .

Everyone is looking for a quick cure, but the bottom line to healthy living is eating a variety of whole foods each day and staying active.

Vegetable Stew



Ingredients:

- ¾ cup chopped onion
- 1 cup sliced carrots
- 1 cup fresh or frozen corn
- 1 cup sliced zucchini
- 1 cup sliced yellow summer squash
- 2 cups chopped potatoes
- 1 can garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained
- 3½ cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 2/3 cup uncooked brown rice
- 1 tsp dried basil
- ¼ tsp dried thyme
- ¼ tsp pepper

Directions:

1. Cook rice according to package directions
2. Sauté onions and carrots in stew pot with cooking spray, until tender
3. Add remaining ingredients. Cover and simmer 10 to 15 minutes or until vegetables are tender

Food Stamps:

To find out if you or someone you know qualifies for food stamps, call 1-800-221-5689.