

Health & Wellbeing

February – Recognising dodgy nutrition advice



1. Does the advice promote detoxes and cleanses?

The word 'detox' is a medical term that is being used as a marketing strategy. A healthy, well-functioning body has many organs, such as the kidneys, liver, skin and lungs that are detoxifying your body right now. Going on a juice cleanse or eating specific foods does not aid this process of detoxification. Put simply, no qualified dietitian or health professional would ever use the word detox unless they were referring to the medical treatment of people with life-threatening drug addictions.

At present, there is no compelling evidence to support the use of detox diets so do yourself a favour and steer clear - however appealing it may sound.



2. Does the advice focus on specific foods?

Many self-proclaimed 'nutrition experts' like to highlight specific foods and claim that they have specific health benefits which make them healthier than regular foods. Good examples are coconut oil, turmeric, quinoa and kale which are elevated above other foods and given 'superfood' status. However, good nutrition is about balance and variety amongst the different food groups. No health professional or dietitian would recommend focusing on one particular food with amazing health benefits; it is about variation.

3. Does the advice restrict food groups?

In contrast, misguided nutrition advice also tends to promote heavily restricting whole or multiple food groups. But avoiding food groups altogether can have serious short and long-term health impacts. Commonly, grains and dairy are recommended to be cut from peoples' diets by 'nutrition experts'. However, The Australian Dietary Guidelines, which contains the best nutrition advice to date, suggests that we eat from all of the five food groups for a reason.

There is a difference between excluding food groups from your diet for a medical reason under the provision of a dietitian or doctor and simply cutting out a food group because of supposed negative health effects.

4. Is the advice marketed with personal stories?

Before and after pictures are one of the poorest forms of evidence. A lot of nutrition misinformation and fad diets are marketed with personal stories of weight loss and health conditions being cured. This is typically due to a lack of scientific research to support their claim. So next time you notice that a recommendation has been 'proven' to be effective by personal anecdotes, reconsider its credibility.



5. Does the advice claim to cure disease?

Many fad diets and particular foods claim to possess healing properties and cure diseases such as cancer. Particular ways of eating, such as avoiding specific foods or food groups can be used as a means to improve symptoms of particular diseases, such as short bowel syndrome, allergies, intolerances and Coeliac disease. However respected organisations, such as the Cancer Council Australia recommend to avoid following any diet claiming to cure cancer.

Although consuming a diet higher in fibre, vitamins and minerals can lower your risk of developing cancer, avoid buying into claims of cancer curing diets, as these self-proclaimed 'nutrition experts' are essentially spreading nonsense.

6. Does the advice contradict generally accepted nutrition guidelines?

Lastly, ask yourself if the recommendation is being echoed by the most reputable health and nutrition organisations in the country. If not, it is very likely that the advice is poor and not supported by scientific research. The consistency of the message is what matters. Is the government, Nutrition Australia, VicHealth, Diabetes Australia and Cancer Council Australia repeating the same message? If the recommendation counters generally accepted nutrition and health guidelines then you are right to question it.

In Australia, the Australian Dietary Guidelines use the best available scientific evidence to provide information on the types and amounts of foods, food groups and dietary patterns to aim to promote health and wellbeing. The guidelines that have been proposed are a result of decades of nutrition research and evidence.

So where do I go for nutrition advice?

For good advice see an Accredited Practising Dietitian. Accredited Dietitians are qualified to offer sound, safe and ethical nutrition information. Accredited Dietitians are university trained for at least four years and are recognised as the gold standard for giving nutrition advice.





Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.
Drink plenty of water.

Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties



Vegetables and legumes/beans



Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans



Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat



Fruit



Use small amounts



Only sometimes and in small amounts

