

Food Misinformation Concerning Health and Disease

- Meat "dries up" the blood.
- Acid condition of the body is aggravated by acid fruits and vegetables.
- Fruits, especially citrus and tomato, are too acid to be handled by the body.
- Never give milk to a patient with fever.
- Fresh pork in summer will make one ill.
- Oranges and tomatoes cause heartburn.
- A variety of foods are blamed for cancer, pork, green salads, meat.
- Liver aggravates hypertension because it builds blood.
- Celery and fish are brain foods.
- Parsnips should be eaten often to cleanse the kidneys.
- Garlic cures high blood pressure.
- Milk is constipating.
- Tropical fruits will cleanse the G. I. tract, contribute to care of cataracts and tumors.
- Protein needs increase with physical activity.
- Beets build blood.
- All vegetables (raw), fruits, and milk, are gas-forming.
- Beets, red meat, eggs, and pork cause or increase hypertension.
- Lemon juice in care of eyes, throat, rectum, or womb will cure almost any disease.
- Related to diabetes mellitus:
- Sour foods (lemon juice or sauerkraut) can be used to cure diabetes.
 - Only fresh orange juice should be used.
 - Honey can be substituted for sugar.
 - Diabetes is caused by eating too many sweets.
- For arthritis, these are recommended:
- Grape Juice, b. Honey
 - Dried poke berries.
 - Carrot juice, e. Tomatoes.
- Celery is good for the nerves.
- Cooked onions will "kill" a cold.
- Cooked cereals heat the blood.
- Too much fat in the diet counteracts vitamin E.
- Cold milk is harmful to children.
- Garlic pills help your memory.
- Black strap molasses is good for anemia and rheumatism.
- Alfalfa tea cures rheumatism.
- Soda makes cabbage digestible.
- Raw potatoes cause pinworms.
- Warm bread causes apoplexy.

Food Fads are

A Health Problem

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OUR FOOD SUPPLY IS the best we have ever had. We live in a land of plenty with enough of all the nutrients available to furnish an ideal diet for our entire population. Protection of our food supplies by industry and by public law has set a high standard for several decades, and the foods available in our markets are as attractive and flavorful as one could find anywhere. These achievements must not make us complacent, however.

In spite of the progress made in improving our food supply to make it adequate for the nation's health, food faddists have been allowed to flourish. Their activities have increased and extended until it has been estimated that nutrition quacks are influencing some 10 million of our people. The health of a significant number of these persons is being endangered through following the diet of the faddist, delaying necessary medical treatment until it is too late for ethical medical care to be of value. About half a billion dollars is spent annually for "health foods," "health aids," and "diet supplements," all products for which no real need exists. Food faddism is a serious health and economic problem.

Nutrition quackery has been known in various forms for many years. It is of the utmost importance that we recognize food faddism as an increasingly serious problem, understand how and why it

continues to exist, and make an all out effort to expose and offset the activities of the faddists.

It is easy to see why food fads have found followers and why the number of supporters has increased in recent years. The faddists and nutrition quacks carry on a successful scale campaign, playing upon natural fears of ill health, and hopes for good health, for long life and freedom from disease. The faddists seek to persuade all who will listen that everyone is suffering from ills caused by diet deficiencies and these self-styled "food experts" promise that all difficulties can be relieved quickly, easily, and without effort by following their theories and recommendations.

Such claims and promises have a strong appeal and all too often are accepted without question. The public has become increasingly conscious of the relationship between food and health. Many persons seeking nutrition information quite naturally tend to follow the course of accepting the attractive and plausible on the basis of their own knowledge, experience, or wishful thinking. Most important, the faddist brings his story to the public and gains attention and interest by making his appeal in a dramatic fashion in words readily understood by all. An aggressive salesman, he knows the truth of the saying, "You have to make calls if you want to get results."

fancies

Despite progress in knowledge of food and nutrition, food fads, misinformation, and quackery continue to flourish to the extent that they make a serious health and economic problem

If we compare the food faddists and quacks of fifty years ago with those of today, we find that a significant change has occurred—a change which gives a clue to the solution of the problem of food faddism as it now exists.

The old-time medicine man, yesterday's nutrition quack, sold his cure-all youth-restoring patent medicines to the small groups he was able to attract to his show on a street corner, in a vacant lot, or at picnics and fairs. He operated in a very small way, under conditions of relatively limited communication and slow spread of public information. Improvements in communication made possible the rapid and widespread dissemination of information. An informed public became conscious of the lack of effectiveness of cure-alls and patent medicines. Exposed, deprived of his protecting cloud of mystery and ignorance, the medicine man disappeared from the scene some 20 years ago. Or did he?

Too good to be true, this disappearing act was in itself an illusion. Adapting himself to changing times and conditions, to a better informed public, the medicine man became a "food expert," dealing in so called health foods and diet supplements instead of patent medicines.

Ironically, it is the food faddist who has recognized and made use of the opportunity afforded by our modern communication methods to reach and influ-

ence great numbers of people quickly and effectively.

Although specific cases vary in detail, depending upon whether the "expert" is a lecturer-author, pseudoscientist crusader, writer of sensational articles and books, or a high pressure salesman appearing on radio and television, fundamentally the food faddist is a fluent speaker or writer. He is willing to make unrestrained and fantastic claims as to the value of his products or theories, disagreeing with established information and condemning generally recognized and authoritative organizations, institutions and regulatory agencies, and he always has something to sell.

Attack on Common Foods Is Frequent Approach

An approach frequently used in promoting food fads is to attack the nutritive value and quality of the common foods in our diet. The public is told that our soil is depleted, that our foods are nutritionally lacking and that all Americans have dietary deficiencies causing a wide variety of difficulties ranging from vague malnutrition to the most severe degenerative diseases. A number of common foods are condemned, including pasteurized milk, fruits and vegetables produced with the aid of commercial fertilizers, and cereal products described as having lost their important nutrients.



Horace Sipple, Nutrition Foundation, speaks before the Division of Agricultural and Food Chemistry at the 125th meeting of the American Chemical Society on food fads and fancies. C. E. Boruff, Hiram Walker and Co. (right) chairman of the Division presided over the meeting

Starting with such claims and arguments which have no basis in fact, the faddist proceeds to promote and sell his own particular products at a ridiculous price—or sell his advice which is based on sheer fantasy. He may use a "diet supplement" or "health food." Or he may sell a book or leaflet setting forth the author's theories. Most "food experts" have a direct interest in the sale of specific "health foods" that are promoted through their publications, lectures, and radio and television programs. There is no lack of faddist ideas and claims. A recent study of food misinformation made by the American Dietetic Association lists some 200 food fads and fantasies in circulation today.

Another faddist approach takes advantage of the widespread popular interest in obesity and its relationship to disease. The food faddist has been alert to this literally golden opportunity in exploiting the fear of obesity and its effects. The racket of reducing aids and diets is now one of the most active and profitable operations of the nutrition quack. Although modern public health legislation has eliminated the more dangerous reducing preparation, such measures have not been able to affect the promotion of dozens of products which manage to stay within the letter of regulations but which "are inert, ineffective, useless, and a waste of time and money," as Max Millman points out in "The Re-

Food Misinformation Concerning Health and Disease (Continued)

- Sassafras thins the blood.
- Eggs eaten when taking sulfa drugs will be fatal.
- Coffee with cream is more harmful than black coffee.
- Fat meat gives a person strength.
- Ice water causes heart trouble.
- Milk, fish, spinach, and oysters increase fertility.
- Mullen tea is good for asthma.
- Foods labeled "Health Foods" have special health giving or curative properties.
- Sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and grapefruit cause acid stomach.
- Foods cooked in aluminum utensils will cause cancer.
- Watermelon or cucumbers causes polio.
- Bottled soft drinks cause polio.
- An egg a day is harmful.
- The continuous use of margarine adversely affects secondary sex characteristics.
- Additional food is needed for mental activity.
- Cheese is constipating.
- Bananas are difficult to digest.
- Raw vegetable juices contain life-giving properties, whereas cooked foods are dead foods.
- Eat "Wonder Foods" such as blackstrap molasses and yoghurt to keep young and fit.
- Vitamin E prevents and cures heart disease, ulcers, phlebitis.
- Milk and starch are contraindicated in sinus trouble.
- Rice, plus regular diet, cures high blood pressure.
- Large amounts of gelatin dissolved in water will strengthen fingernails.
- Eggs cause hardening of the arteries.
- Olives, oysters, raw eggs increase sexual potency.
- Grapes will cure cancer and ulcers.
- Huckleberry tea will cure diabetes.
- Wine makes blood.
- Everybody needs vitamin concentrates.
- Beets are beneficial as a cleansing food.
- Vitamins are "cure-alls."
- White bread is poisonous.
- Raw vegetables, especially cauliflower, are poisonous.

(Partial list from report on Food Misinformation, 1952-53, Community Nutrition Section, American Dietetic Association)

ducing Racket" in the January 1954 issue of *Today's Health*.

The promises of the faddist are well designed to appeal to the great majority of people who would like to reduce, but who want to do so quickly, easily and without dieting. Claims play upon this wishful thinking, ignoring the fact that to reduce weight the caloric value of the food eaten must be less than the calories expended.

Many of the current reducing remedies are simply candies containing vitamins and minerals—advertised as such and sold at a high price as a dietary aid in reducing. Others are chiefly vitamin or vitamin and mineral capsules. Of a somewhat different type are the products made of a nonfood substance which forms a voluminous gel when mixed with water. Taken with water before meals, the product is intended to form a large mass in the stomach, creating a feeling of satiety and reducing the food intake. The quack promoter of such products is not concerned with the fact that the inert bulk has little effect since it tends to form in the intestinal tract rather than in the stomach, nor that the food consumed will not be adequate in nutritional value.

Modern Medicine Men

All types of food fads have one identifying characteristic—claims unlimited in scope and as fraudulent as any made by the medicine man of yesterday. An important difference is that today the glib words and phrases bombard the public not only through advertisements and lectures by "food experts," but through radio and television reaching directly into homes with powerful, high pressure sales programs. The extent to which faddists and quacks are willing and financially able to go in product promotion is sufficient evidence in itself that food fads represent a huge and profitable business.

Let no one doubt the existence of the food faddist or the fact that his activities continue to represent a real menace to public health. Every thoughtful person should be concerned with this problem. We can deal effectively with nutrition quackery only when the public is provided with sound nutrition information so that food fads and fallacies will be recognized and rejected.

Some of our authoritative sources of nutrition information are: The United States Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, State health departments, nutrition and home economics departments of recognized colleges and universities, the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council, the Council on Foods and Nutrition of the American Medical Association, and The Nutrition Foundation, Inc. Information is given by these groups upon request.

We must admit, however, that present educational measures are not getting the job done.

Federal and state laws are designed to protect against food frauds but they do not reach the entire objective. The Federal Food and Drug Administration enforces the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to keep dangerous, impure, and dishonestly labeled food and drug products out of interstate commerce. The Federal Trade Commission acts similarly with respect to advertising claims.

The point to be recognized is that our present protective measures are not sufficient. As Commissioner Crawford of the Food and Drug Administration has pointed out, nutrition quackery cannot be dealt with adequately by law. The Food and Drug Administration can act only if a product is shipped in interstate commerce and if the labeling includes false or misleading statements. No action can be taken by the Food and Drug Administration if the quack confines his activities to false teachings in radio and television programs, public lectures, pamphlets, magazines, and books. Where the false or misleading matter cannot be classified as commodity advertising, the Federal Trade Commission can take no action.

Dealing effectively with nutrition quackery is very largely an educational problem. It requires focusing attention on both elementary and adult education, and it is a continuous problem. Instruction in the principles of good nutrition should be a regular feature of elementary education, beginning in kindergarten. This can be done without adding special courses. A second educational program is necessary for adults.

A good beginning toward better dissemination of nutrition information has been made through the educational programs of food companies. A coordinated program to augment the work of individual food companies, existing educational agencies, and health organizations would not only expose and offset food faddism by replacing fantasy with fact but would also meet the all-important continuing need for a practical guide to good nutrition in everyday life.

The needed extra educational effort, carried on authoritatively and at a policy level that would be entirely fair, could be developed with modest support. Cooperation within the food industry should play a very important part in such a program.

It would be difficult indeed to make a greater contribution to public health and to a more intelligent national economy.

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