



## Evaluating Nutrition Information

*By Barbara H. James, Professor Emeritus, The Ohio State University*

Nutrition is one of today's most interesting sciences. The link between diet and health has been scientifically documented, and as a result, nutrition has become big business. Diet books, special foods, and vitamin supplements abound. Nutritional "discoveries" or "warnings" are breaking news stories. It is no wonder that many people are confused about the accuracy of nutrition information.

There are few scientific "breakthroughs." Science is evolutionary and not revolutionary. Scientific evidence builds over time as research progresses. Progress is usually slow and the research may make many detours. Repetitive studies are conducted before the scientific community will stand behind a hypothesis.

**The next time you read or hear about nutritional discoveries be skeptical if the information:**

- ? Is not provided by a reputable, scientific-research-based organization such as the American Heart Association, Ohio State University Extension, or government health organizations, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.
- ? Is not provided by an individual with a degree in nutrition or a related field.
- ? Makes recommendations which are quick or easy.
- ? Is a "miraculous" breakthrough.
- ? Sounds too good to be true.
- ? Claims to have special, secret, ancient, or natural ingredients.
- ? Relies on personal stories of success rather than on scientific research from multiple studies.
- ? Claims that the government, medical, or scientific community refuses to acknowledge the effectiveness of the cure, treatment, or product.
- ? Draws simplistic conclusions from complex studies.
- ? Lists "good" and "bad" foods.
- ? Recommends that certain foods or supplements should be taken as "nutrition insurance."

- ? Claims that most Americans are poorly nourished or are being “poisoned.”
- ? Does not promote a balanced diet by recommending the removal of a whole group of foods, such as carbohydrates like bread, pasta, or cereal.
- ? Is based on results from a single study.



Sources:

Federal Trade Commission, *The Facts About Weight Loss Products and Programs*, Publication No. (FDA) 92-1189.

Food and Drug Administration, *Losing Weight Safely*, Publication No. (FDA) 96-1247, September 1996.

International Food Information Council, *Fad Diets: Look Before You Leap*, Food Insight Newsletter, March/April 2000.

All educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, age, disability, or Vietnam-era veteran status.

Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension.

TDD No. 1-800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 1-614-292-1868