



10 Signs Your Health Guru Is a Quack

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We are all suffering from information-obesity. We are flooded with constant information from emails, websites, and social media. This makes it hard to know who to trust, especially for something as important as what to eat. In a previous [article](#), I described 10 factors for knowing who to trust for nutrition advice. But this time I am focusing on who **not** to trust. Below are ten signs someone may be a nutrition quack.

1. **Quackery:** They believe everyone should avoid gluten.

Reality: Some individuals have an allergy to gluten, called Celiac's disease. Others are sensitive to a high-gluten diet and may experience abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea, or constipation. But most individuals are not allergic or sensitive to gluten. For those of us who haven't been diagnosed with a sensitivity or allergy to gluten, we should focus on eating a wide variety of intact whole grains. Plus, many whole grains do not contain any gluten and are fine for those with gluten issues, such as brown rice, quinoa, oats, sorghum, buckwheat, einkorn, emmer, Kamut, amaranth, teff, corn, and spelt. Those with gluten disorders should also look out for cross-contact with a gluten-containing food.

2. **Quackery:** They believe soy causes cancer, disrupts sex hormones, and impairs thyroid function and the absorption of important nutrients.

Reality: The weight of the evidence indicates soy foods, such as tofu, tempeh, edamame, and unsweetened soy milk are healthy choices. The World Cancer Research Fund found evidence soy can reduce the risk of breast cancer recurrence and help you live longer. Many are not aware that the Dietary Guidelines for Americans updated their dairy food group to include fortified soy beverages and soy yogurt. Soy is the only legume the Dietary Guidelines specifically recommends due to its favorable nutrient profile.

There is another misconception that phytoestrogens in soy feminize men by lowering testosterone and increasing estrogen. This has been extensively studied and the evidence shows phytoestrogens do not have a negative effect on male reproductive hormones. Studies analyzing soy consumption find either no effect or a decreased risk of prostate cancer.

3. **Quackery:** They don't think high LDL cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease.

Reality: The major heart disease organizations, such as the American Heart Association and European Atherosclerosis Society, now agree that high LDL (above seventy or eighty mg/dL) is the only prerequisite for heart disease. Not everyone with high LDL will get heart disease. But no one without high LDL, for a prolonged period, will get it. We should all pay attention to our LDL level, as heart disease is responsible for one third of all deaths worldwide.

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4. **Quackery:** Butter is Back! They don't think foods high in saturated fat increase LDL cholesterol and the risk of heart disease.

Reality: Some quacks point to studies showing eating less saturated fat doesn't decrease the risk of heart disease. Those studies looked at people who replaced high saturated fat foods with the standard American diet of ultra-processed food. As stated in a Harvard Public Health article, "Exchanging a hot buttered cheesesteak for a half-dozen doughnuts does not help your heart; swapping it for grilled salmon with greens and olive oil does."

One of the lead authors of the original study that led to the "Butter is Back" quote was directly asked whether butter is back. His answer was, "Definitely not . . . people should prioritize those foods that we know improve health, and butter is not one of them."

5. **Quackery:** They don't believe a lifetime of high sodium from added salt has health risks.

Reality: According to Global Burden of Disease, a high sodium intake causes more deaths each year than any other dietary factor. If Americans cut their salt intake in half, it would save \$1.5 trillion dollars over the next twenty years. All reputable health organizations agree too much salt causes health issues.

Sodium increases the risk of high blood pressure and is linked to weight-gain. Added salt also increases the addictive quality of food. When you reduce sodium, you can favorably alter your brain chemistry and reward pathways. Sodium also impairs the healthy functioning of your arteries by causing inflammation and increasing artery stiffness.

The World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) found strong evidence foods preserved by salting increases the risk of stomach and nasopharynx cancer. High salt alters the mucus protecting the stomach, can damage the stomach lining, and causes lesions which could become cancerous. High salt intake also stimulates the colonization of the *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) bacteria. *H. pylori* is the strongest known risk factor for stomach cancer.

6. **Quackery:** They claim to have discovered the secret truth that health care organizations have all missed.

Reality: There is a dangerous trend of individuals believing they are smarter than the experts. Before issuing its recommendations, the WCRF analyzed more than 500,000 studies using research teams from the best universities in the world. Believing an individual figured something out that an organization like the WCRF missed is like believing you don't have to pay your taxes because you watched some documentary on the internet. A lengthy prison sentence may knock some reality into those people, but unfortunately listening to the wrong health advice may not have consequences until it is too late.

7. **Quackery:** They demonize certain plant foods due to antinutrients such as phytates, lectins, oxalates, and tannins.

Reality: There is no need to worry about antinutrients. Instead, we should focus on eating a wide variety of fruit, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, seeds, and nuts.

8. **Quackery:** They believe seed oils, such as canola, sesame, flax, and hemp, promote inflammation and oxidative stress.

Reality: There is not a single health care organization, anywhere on the planet, that recommends avoiding seed oils because they promote inflammation and oxidative stress (although some organizations recommend limiting all oils because they are high in calories). Yes, seed oils have omega-6 fats, but contrary to popular belief, omega-6 fats are very healthy and reduce the risk of heart disease. Almost all health care organizations universally recommend consuming liquid plant oils (seed oils are a liquid plant oil) in place of added solid fats, such as coconut oil, butter, palm oil, palm kernel oil, ghee, bacon grease, lard, chicken fat, and tallow. Liquid plant oils are low in saturated fat which reduce LDL cholesterol when it replaces foods higher in saturated fat. It is easy to recognize the good added fats from the bad – the good ones are liquid at room temperature and the ones higher in saturated fat are solid at room temperature.

9. **Quackery:** They advise everyone to avoid legumes, whole grains, or fruit. There are many reasons given to avoid these foods. For example, promoters of the paleo diet often try to convince us to avoid legumes due to the phytates.

Reality: The truth is phytates are not a problem in cooked legumes, and we almost universally only eat cooked legumes.

One way to judge the healthiness of a diet is by the amount of fruit, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, seeds, and nuts it contains. Each of these food groups contains different nutrients. It is best not to avoid any of them in totality. Some people may have intolerances to specific foods (or allergies), but this doesn't mean you should be eliminating the entire food group.

10. Sigma Nutrition has officially put them in the "Quack Asylum". Sigma Nutrition has a popular nutrition podcast. Its hosts, Danny Lennon and Alan Flanagan, often point out nutrition quackery and place the promoters of this misinformation in what they call the Quack Asylum. You will have to listen to their podcasts to find out who is in the Quack Asylum, but after a good dose of their solid nutrition education you will be able to recognize the quacks for yourself.

I didn't name any specific individuals or organizations as there are too many quacks in the nutrition world to list them all – and I didn't want to leave any out. Instead, pay attention to the claims above. When you hear one of them, your quack sense should start tingling. The best thing to do when you hear one of these claims is to just move on.

P.S. Don't forget to take my [Expert Diet IQ](#) quiz to test your habit change and nutrition IQ.