The essential piece of information you must know to improve your health

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Do you want to feel, look, or be healthier? Is it important for you to do the right things to prevent heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, or Alzheimer's? Are you trying to lose weight? If one of these problems is important to you, then you need to know who you can trust for accurate, credible nutrition information.

Let's start with who you cannot trust: the media and fad diet books. I have been a secret nutrition nerd for the last 14 years. I have a certificate in Plant-Based Nutrition, a Certification in Evidence-Based Optimal Nutrition from Harvard, and am a (non-practicing) Certified Personal Trainer. I started my journey reading books from doctors about the perfect diet. Then I graduated to finding published academic studies and reading them myself. I eventually learned both strategies have problems.

Below are 10 factors to consider when deciding who you should trust for accurate and unbiased information on healthy eating:

1. Be suspicious of anyone who has never changed their position on anything related to nutrition. The research is constantly growing. As new research is published opinions and interpretations should change. If someone's belief in a perfect food or diet reminds you of the devotion some have to a spouse or religion, you may want to steer clear. The real experts are always open to their views changing based on new evidence.

2. Be suspect of those making a living from an entrenched belief. Don't expect to hear unbiased information from someone selling a product or service tied to a dogmatic belief. As Upton Sinclair said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it." However, just because someone is selling a product or service they are passionate about does not make them untrustworthy. It is just one factor to consider.

3. Be cautious of those giving advice in terms of fat, protein, or carbohydrates. There is no secret ratio that defines the perfect diet. You can have a healthy or unhealthy meal that is high fat, high carb, or high protein. It is not the fat, carbs, or protein that determine whether a food is healthy. It is the entire food that is important. A piece of bacon and a piece of King salmon are both high in fat. One is recommended by the American Heart Association to reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, sudden cardiac death, and congestive heart failure.[1] The other increases the risk of heart disease and is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), part of the World Health Organization, as a Group 1 carcinogen known to cause cancer in humans.

4. One person's experience is not relevant to the general population. Many healthy eating books are written by individuals who became passionate about telling others how they made improvements to

their health. Unfortunately, most of us are not very good about figuring out what exactly caused the positive changes. That is why we have randomized controlled research studies, so we can isolate the variables that really make a difference.

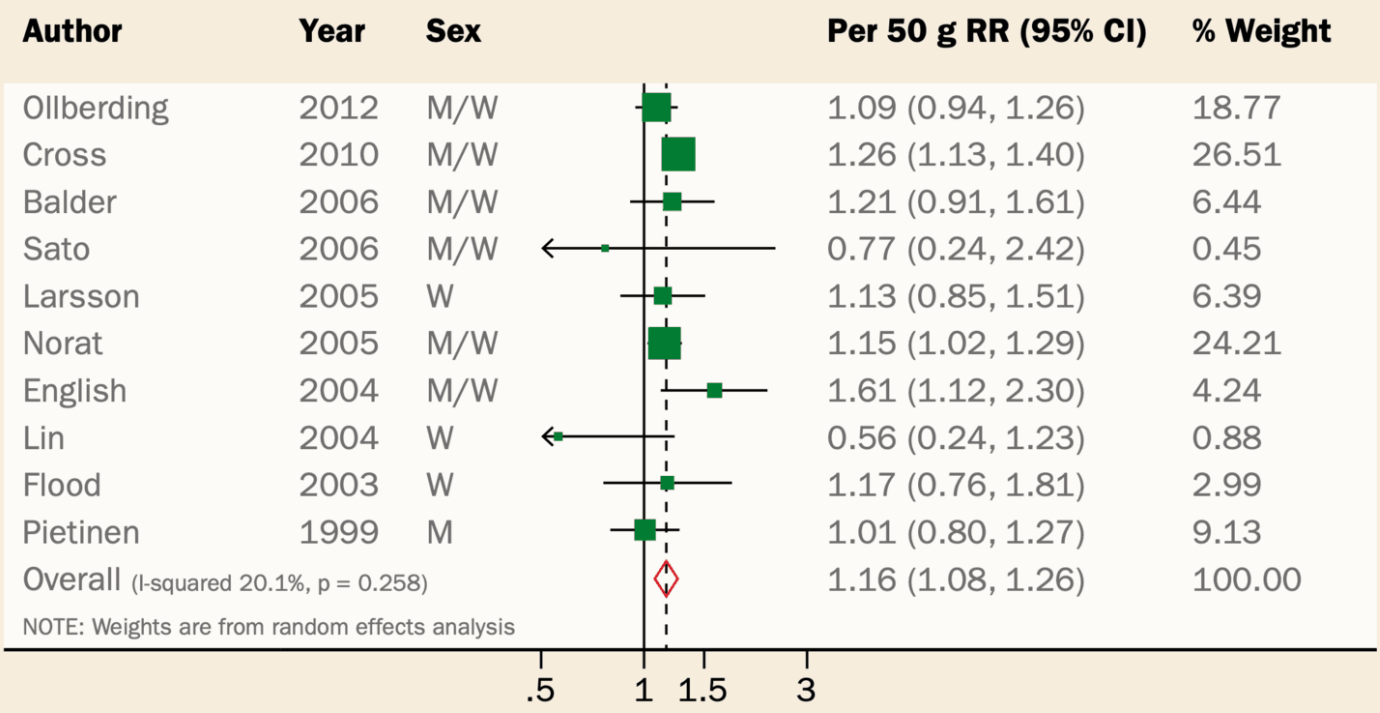
5. The results of a single study may not tell you anything meaningful. Someone recently pointed out a study showing that eating fish increases the risk of cancer. But who cares what one study says if 25 other studies come to the opposite conclusion. You need to know where the weight of the evidence points after a review of *all* of the evidence. According to the World Cancer Research Fund, after reviewing all of the evidence, they found there is some “limited suggestive” evidence fish reduces the risk of liver and colorectal cancer.

6. Listen to *organizations* whose job it is to give accurate nutrition advice designed to increase the public’s health and longevity. There is a frightening recent trend for people to think they know more than the experts. Individuals do not have the resources or expertise to provide analyses of thousands of studies, and they may have vested interests and biases that cloud their judgment.

7. Organizations may also be biased. Be careful of organizations who receive funding or advertising from the food industry. How much can you trust an organization’s recommendations about soda if they are receiving advertising dollars from the soda industry? The Dietary Guidelines for Americans have been steeped in controversy for decades over its conflicts of interest.[2]

8. Pay more attention to organizations who grade the weight of the evidence and statistically analyze the data. The expert organizations now grade the evidence to let you know whether the interpretation of the research is based on strong or weak evidence. They also analyze the data using appropriate statistical methods. Do you know how to read a forest plot? Most individuals writing the latest fad diet books do not. Below is a forest plot from the World Cancer Research Fund related to processed meat intake and the risk of colorectal cancer. A forest plot analyzing the various research studies is a good sign the analysis may be sound.

Figure 8: Dose-response meta-analysis of processed meat and colorectal cancer per 50 grams per day



9. Look for transparency. If an organization recommends everyone should eat an apple every day to keep the doctor away, then they should provide us with the methodology they used to come to that conclusion. What exact studies did they review and how did they combine the results to reach their conclusion.

10. The best organizations use the Bradford Hill criteria to evaluate causality. Sir Austin Bradford Hill was a leading thinker in the field of epidemiology (the study of the causes of health and disease in populations). He came up with a set of criteria in 1965 for evaluating whether an observed association is causal.[3] For example, if studies indicate people who eat the most bacon have a higher risk of colorectal cancer, how do you know if the bacon caused the increased risk or if bacon eaters are more overweight which causes the increased risk. Hill's criteria are designed to answer questions like that.

The World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) seems to check more of these boxes than any other organization I am aware of. Let's look at why I consider the WCRF to be "the" expert in this area.

World Cancer Research Fund

The WCRF was formed in 1982 and is comprised of four charities: the American Institute for Cancer Research in the US, World Cancer Research Fund UK, Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands, and World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong. The WCRF was the first charity to create an awareness of the link between diet and cancer, fund research into diet and cancer prevention, and the first to analyze all the global research on the links between diet, weight, physical activity, and cancer.

They developed a three-phase process. In phase one, 20 world-renowned experts established a

formal process for determining which studies were relevant and how best to analyze them. In phase two, nine independent international research teams were formed to analyze the studies according to the process established in phase one. In phase three, the experts evaluate the studies and issue recommendations. As part of this process, they reviewed all the available research – more than 500,000 studies.

In 2018 the WCRF issued its latest report, *Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective*. The Report is based on reducing the risk of cancer, but they realized you could not isolate one disease, as the goal is to help us live longer, healthier lives, not just avoid cancer. Therefore, the recommendations take into account the other major chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and dementia. They consider obesity a disease of its own, so the Report shows not only what to eat to avoid chronic diseases, but it is also a blueprint on how best to maintain a healthy weight.

World Cancer Research Fund

American Institute for Cancer Research

CUP Continuous Update Project

Analysing research on cancer prevention and survival

Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective

A summary of the Third Expert Report

World Cancer Research Fund International

World Cancer Research Fund UK

Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds

World Cancer Research Fund 世界癌症研究基金會

To put this in perspective, the 2018 Report is more than 12,000 pages, not including the 19 systematic literature reviews they published that formed the basis of the report. No other organization has ever produced such a comprehensive analysis of lifestyle factors and disease. **If the WCRF got it wrong, then no one has it right.**

The WCRF is the first place I look for accurate unbiased nutrition information. The 2018 Report has an immense amount of information they have reduced to simple recommendations and guidelines. The websites for the American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund UK also have incredible amounts of useful information that cut through the fog of misinformation we routinely hear from the media and the latest fad diet books.

The only problem with obtaining your information from the most credible sources is that it can be difficult to find the information you are looking for. They are experts in nutrition, not marketing. In my next article I will summarize the foundations of a healthy diet according to the most credible nutrition experts and show you where you can find this information for yourself.

I am curious whether you have heard of the WCRF and if you also find it difficult to know who to trust in this confusing area.

About the Author: Keith Herman is an estate planning attorney who is also passionate about nutrition and helping others live their healthiest lives.

#HealthyEating

#HealthyLifestyle

#Wellness

References

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