

Media Literacy: The Importance of Reading Past the Headlines

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*Do you believe everything you read in the media?
In today's world of social media and sensationalized
messages, athletes are bombarded with information
about the best foods, the best supplements and the
best way to improve athletic performance. It can be
overwhelming for even the most knowledgeable athletes.*

*That's why it's important to read past the headlines and
recognize evidence-based-information vs. myths and
misinformation.*

HOW TO BECOME MORE MEDIA SAVVY

Becoming media savvy requires some critical evaluation on your part, which begins as soon as you read the message or headline. Ask yourself:

1. Is the information reliable and credible?
2. Is the message or headline exaggerated or clickbait?
3. Is the information based on scientific evidence or is it anecdotal?
4. Does the headline match the conclusion? If so, are the studies mentioned applicable to your situation?

Answering these questions helps you identify whether the message or article is based on facts or myths. Here's what is meant by each.

RELIABILITY AND CREDIBILITY

Reliable nutrition advice should be backed by evidence, not opinion, so look for credible sources.

Ask yourself if the message is providing information or is it an infomercial for a product or service. If an author is listed or quotes are cited, what is the educational background of the person providing the information?

The person behind the supplement store counter may seem knowledgeable, but store associates haven't likely gone through any training other than what the product salespeople tell them. This doesn't mean it is incorrect information, but it does mean that it has bias, so you need to be careful.

When reading an article, try to identify the writer's sources to make sure that the information is coming from a knowledgeable place or person. And look for messaging from an expert., like a scientist who has their PhD and has studied the topic, a registered dietitian with years of schooling, or a medical doctor. Unreliable sources may include a lobbyist, celebrity, or blogger who happens to eat, exercise, or have an opinion on a specific nutrition-related topic.



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CLICKBAIT AND EXAGGERATION

The next step is to identify whether the message is clickbait or an exaggeration. Ask yourself, "Does it seem too good to be true?"

Clickbait is an exaggerated headline written to grab your attention. It's meant to entice you to read more yet is often just an advertisement or marketing message. Authors often get paid based on the number of times the headline is clicked. If you just read the title, but not the article, you may walk away with inaccurate conclusions. "Eat this food to shave years off your life," is an example of an exaggerated message meant to entice you to click or believe.

When you do click, make sure to read the entire message and identify the source before believing what you read.

ANECDOTES VS. SCIENCE

It's also important to determine if the message is based on scientific evidence or is anecdotal.

An anecdote is when someone tells you their experience. It is their own story, not based on science. The statement, "My grandmother smoked a pack of cigarettes a day and lived to be 101 years old," is anecdotal. While that statement might be true, it doesn't mean that everyone who smokes will live that long. In fact, scientific evidence tells us otherwise.

Science, on the other hand, is based on research studies and evidence. For scientists to make a conclusion, the outcome must be seen in many people, not just one or two. Before the conclusion can be applied to a broader number of people, the scientific community evaluates the design of the study and looks to replicate findings to ensure outcomes are consistent. Only then, when numerous studies have been done with similar outcomes, can a population-based conclusion can be made about a topic.

DOES THE HEADLINE MATCH THE CONCLUSION?

Headlines are meant to drive your interest in a topic, not tell the full story. Say, for example, the media shares a new study claiming that a supplement "increases testosterone." But, when you read and evaluate the study, you discover it was done on elderly men living in a nursing home. And, just because it had a result in elderly men, doesn't mean it will have the same result in young, healthy, active males.

When reading headlines, don't assume the conclusion is relevant to you. Always ask yourself, "Who was the subject of the study?" and "What did the study actually measure and conclude?"



MYTHS VS. FACTS

A myth is a widely believed but false idea or statement.

Food and nutrition myths come and go, often leading to different eating fads and trends that can persist for a while and then change over time. For example, there is currently a trend toward consuming more plant-based foods. While eating more plant-based foods, like fruits and vegetables is beneficial, the trend also brings with it many fads about which plant-based foods are best, and myths about plant-based foods in comparison to animal products.

Before jumping on a new fad, use your critical thinking skills to evaluate it, and get the facts before believing statements around food and nutrition. A great example is the current plant-based milk trend. Almond "milk," touted as a replacement to cow's milk, does not supply the same nutrition.

DAIRY MILK VS ALMOND 'MILK'



Per cup	Protein	Vitamin B6	Vitamin B 12	Leucine	Potassium
1% Cow's Milk	8 g	.090 mg	1.07 mcg	.915 g	366 mg
Almond Milk	1 g	0 mg	0 mcg	0 g	175.5 mg

Reference: <https://tools.myfooddata.com/nutrition-facts.php?food=174832&serv=wt1&qty=1>; ESHA

BOTTOM LINE

Being an educated consumer starts with media literacy. Follow these steps each time you read or hear a message so you can determine for yourself if what you are reading is worth sharing.



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