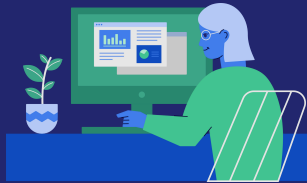


Managing Health & Nutrition Misinformation



What is health or nutrition misinformation?

Information that is “false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time.”¹

Common Examples of Misinformation¹



Selective quotations of individuals and/or research that change the intended meaning by not including the full context

Images or memes originally created as a joke but are then reshared where people believe they are true



Websites that seem credible but include false or misleading information & articles

Old articles or research prior to new developments that are recirculated as if they are recent



How to spot misinformation²



Is the advice backed by credible scientific evidence?

Any advice provided should be supported by scientific references from peer-reviewed journals rather than anecdotal testimonials or stories. You should also check to ensure the evidence they are using is more than just one study, completed with a relevant population or study group, and the advice represents the full findings rather than simple, incomplete conclusions.



Is it overly negative or casting doubt on current trusted diet practices or organizations?

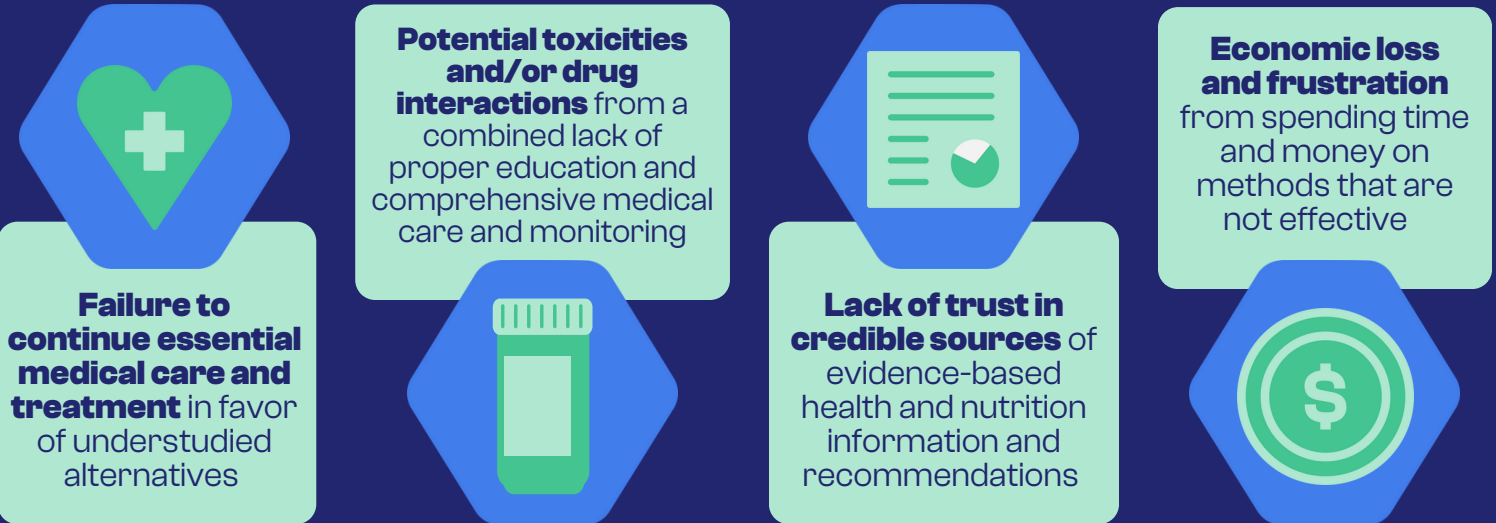
Sometimes less credible sources will try to shift the attention away from their lack of scientific evidence by instead pointing out issues with current trusted practices or organizations that may contradict their advice.



Does it offer extreme promises or advice?

Be wary of products that may sound too good to be true to offer a “quick fix” as diet and lifestyle changes often take time and effort to be successfully maintained. Advice that promotes extreme restrictions or villainizes certain foods or food groups should also be met with caution, given the current dietary guidelines promotion of a balanced diet.

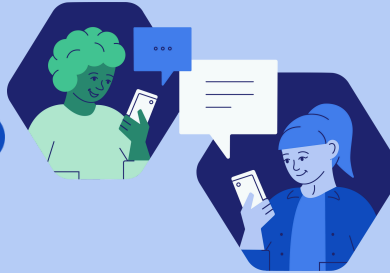
The importance of managing health and nutrition misinformation through prevention and correction is emphasized by the many ways that this type of misinformation can be particularly harmful, including, but not limited to:²



Tips for how to manage misinformation^{1,3}

Be respectful of your audience

- Actively listen & empathize with your audience's perspective
- Determine your audience's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values to better tailor strategy and messages
- Act with civility – don't publicly shame and avoid being combative or overly defensive



Keep message simple

- Use short and simple facts with supporting evidence
- Balance providing enough context to ensure understanding while not providing too much detail to cause confusion
- Use relatable and inclusive terms and language that the audience will recognize and resonate with

Find & use the facts

- Reach out to credible, credentialed experts (like Registered Dietitian Nutritionists or RDNs) with experience in the topic area to receive guidance and additional information
- Cite credible references or sources with messages whenever possible to build trust & credibility
- Emphasize consensus among science and experts



Use strategies to amplify message

- Correcting misinformation is most successful when it comes from trusted sources, including credentialed experts like RDNs for nutrition information and credible public health websites.
- Utilize social media and other online platforms where the audience is active to amplify a message and/or control and prevent the spread of misinformation.

Inform rather than correct

- Put focus on accurate information rather than misinformation
- Avoid repeating misinformation if possible or only mention it briefly if needed for discussion of correct facts
- May not need to correct inaccurate info – sometimes just putting the correct information out there is enough



Be patient and persistent

- Correcting misinformation takes time and repetition through the right channels
- There is strong evidence that correcting misperceptions can change health-related attitudes and beliefs, but it is unclear whether this translates to reflected behavior changes

References:

1. Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. A Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation. U.S. Health and Human Services. Published Nov 8, 2021. Accessed Nov 4, 2024. <https://oeh.gsa.gov/assets/publications/2120-health-misinformation-toolkit.pdf>.
2. Garden-Robinson, J. Finding the Truth I: Reliable Nutrition and Health Information. North Dakota State University. Published Jan 2024. Accessed Nov 4, 2024. <https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/publications/finding-truth-i-reliable-nutrition-and-health-information>
3. American Psychological Association. 8 Recommendations for Countering Misinformation. Updated Mar 1, 2024. Accessed Nov 21, 2024. <https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/misinformation-recommendations>