

Nutrition myth-busting

Just because a product says its true, doesn't mean that it is.
by Karen Giles-Smith

Every day, we operate on information overload. To add insult to injury, much of the information we're exposed to—especially on the Internet—is bunk. Health information is no exception. Take Slim Soap, for example. The following is from an actual Internet site:

Just Lather Up. Watch the Fat Go Down the Drain! Aqili Seaweed Soap is an amazing soap for weight loss and skin health. You can safely use every day: just step into the shower to wash away fat in specific areas of your body.

"It was a wonderful soap: I did not notice my body changed after using one bar but I found that my special parts slimmed down obviously after using three bars. I also brought the soap with me on my vacation."

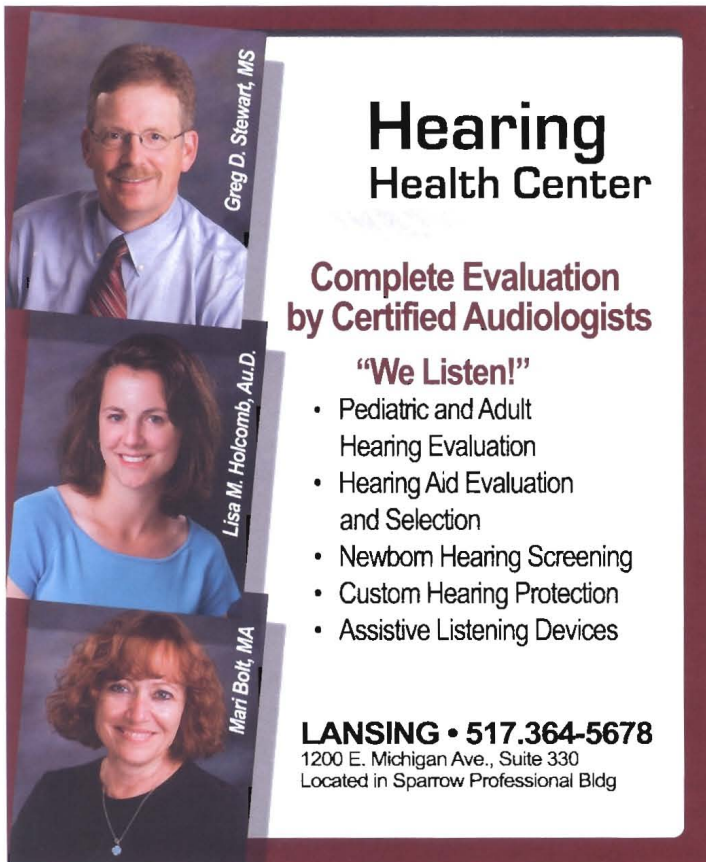
- Cheryle Easton, FL

(Pardon me, but my "special parts" are the last things I want to melt away and wash down the drain.)

Some misinformation, such as the Slim Soap scam, is obvious; some is not. To protect your health, you need to know how to ferret out fact from fiction. Be a truth sleuth—it doesn't take a medical degree. What it takes is looking at health and nutrition claims with a critical eye and some common sense. Think twice: Who wrote it? Why? In other words, consider the source and the motivation. Why hasn't this "fact" made front page medical news?

Often, it doesn't take much investigation to get the scoop. For DIY myth-busting, visit QuackWatch.com, Snopes.com and the Web sites of reputable scientific organizations such as WebMD.com, MayoClinic.com, the International Food Information Council (IFIC) at foodinsight.org, and the American Dietetic Association at eatright.org. Soon, you'll develop an eye for myths and misinformation. The "Ten Red Flags of Junk Science" from the American Dietetic Association will help you put nutrition claims through the paces. Information is suspect if it involves:

- Recommendations that promise a quick fix



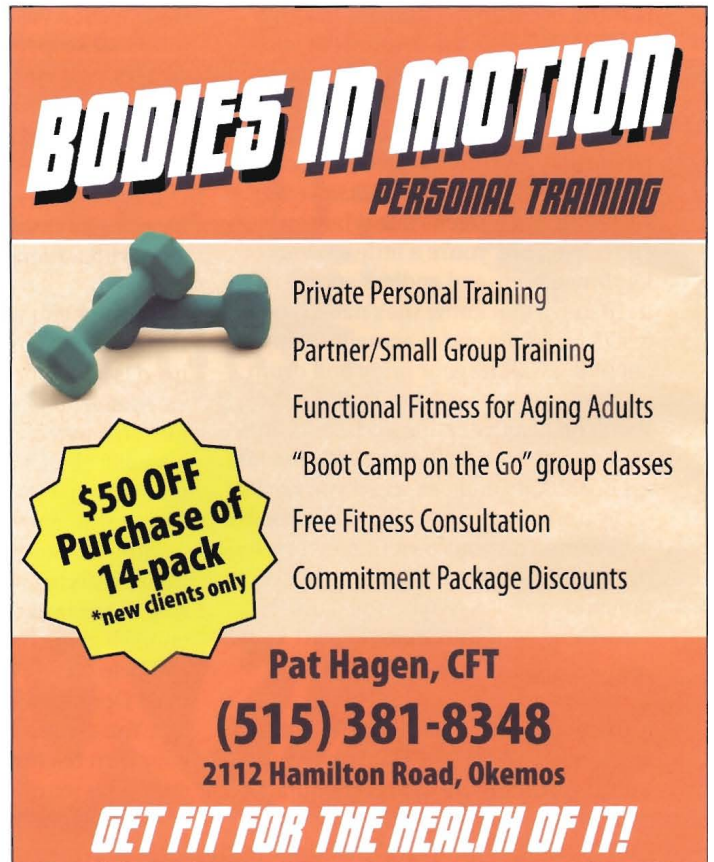
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GET FIT FOR THE HEALTH OF IT!

- Dire warnings of danger from a single product or regimen
- Claims that sound too good to be true
- Simplistic conclusions drawn from a complex study
- Recommendations based on a single study
- Dramatic statements that are refuted by reputable scientific organizations
- Lists of "good" and "bad" foods
- Recommendations made to help sell a product
- Recommendations based on studies published without peer review
- Recommendations from studies that ignore individual group differences

To build your myth-busting repertoire, here are reality checks on a few common nutrition myths.

Myth: The less fat you eat, the better. *Busted!* Fats are necessary for health. They're involved in many body functions such as the transport of vitamins A, D, E, and K so they can be absorbed. Fats provide energy. They also play a key role in early brain development. We often hear advice to cut down on the amount of fat we eat, but for good health, we

need to eat an adequate amount—but not too much—and choose the right types of fats. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that the majority of dietary fat come from two sources: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat, which are mostly derived from oils in plants. When they replace saturated fats and trans fats in the diet, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats help reduce blood cholesterol levels. Common examples of monounsaturated fats are canola, olive and peanut oils. Sources of polyunsaturated fats include corn and soybean oils as well as many seeds, nuts and their oils. Sources: IFIC and the American Dietetic Association.

Myth: Skipping breakfast aids weight loss. *Busted!* Adults who skip breakfast are at greater risk for weight gain and obesity, whereas regular breakfast-eaters tend to have healthier weights. Kids and teens who eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight, too. Why? Eating breakfast may boost metabolism and help the body regulate insulin levels. Also, studies show that breakfast-skippers make up for missed calories by eating more throughout the day. Breakfast also boosts brain power: Eating breakfast provides needed nutrients and improves concentration. In fact, research shows

kids who eat breakfast do better in school. To super-charge your day and stave off hunger, enjoy a breakfast with some protein and fiber. Try peanut butter on a whole-grain English muffin; cereal topped with fruit and milk; or a parfait made with vanilla yogurt, fruit and granola. Sources: IFIC and the American Dietetic Association.

Myth: Sugar causes hyperactivity. *Busted!* Numerous studies with different populations show that sugar consumption does not affect hyperactivity, attention span, or cognitive performance in children. In the 1970s, sugar was linked to hyperactivity on an anecdotal basis, but research didn't confirm it. The research showed that children did not experience hyperactivity after single large doses or consistent high intakes of sugars. Actually, research suggests that sugars may calm children and adults. However, the excitement of the occasion, such as a birthday party or Halloween, could override the calming effect. Sources: IFIC, the American Dietetic Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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