

Red Flags for Nutrition and Fitness Fads

How do you know an exercise or nutrition tip on social media is trustworthy or safe?

The old adage “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is” certainly applies to some nutrition and fitness fads. In fact, some “lose weight fast” challenges can even be harmful — especially if they are not based on any solid research or medical facts.

A study published in *BMC Public Health* analyzed thousands of Instagram “fitspiration” posts and concluded nearly two-thirds of them contained information that was misleading or just plain wrong. University of Vermont researchers delved into TikTok posts about nutrition, diet and weight loss and concluded that the “advice” offered was a glorification of fast weight loss. It was not credible information about nutrition and healthy diets. And Australian researchers found that only 48% of nutrition information on social media and websites is accurate.

Researchers have also found frequently visiting social media accounts that push images of “desirable body types” may lower personal body satisfaction, increase worries about sexual attractiveness and contribute to eating disorders.

Ask yourself these questions when scrolling social media and to help recognize red flags:

- **Are influencers promoting real fitness or toxic thinness?** Many body types can be healthy, even if they are not stick-thin or lack body-builder muscles. Make sure the images are realistic.
- **Is a hyped exercise or diet program sustainable?** A high-intensity training program, a strict “miracle” diet or a “detox” plan may be dangerous for some people.
- **Are they trying to sell you something?** Be wary if you need to buy expensive supplements or sign up for a lengthy fitness plan to “get results.”
- **Bottom line:** Do not blindly trust health information from social media, especially if you have any pre-existing health conditions. Talk to your health care provider before jumping in and potentially wasting time and money — and possibly risking your health.



Say Cheese

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Once maligned for its fat content, cheese is back in the spotlight for its health benefits.

Filled with bone-building calcium and protein, it’s time to rethink cheese and its endless culinary possibilities.

Here are some of the health benefits of cheese.

Promotes good gut health: Some types of cheese are made through fermentation. Eating fermented cheese may provide beneficial bacteria to the gut, which helps promote normal digestion. Choose cheeses that have been aged but not heated afterward, such as Swiss, provolone, Gouda and cheddar.

Supports healthy bones: Milk products such as cheese are positively associated with bone mineral density. Cheese contains calcium, phosphorus and protein, which support bone health.

Benefits heart health: For years, studies indicated that foods high in saturated fats, including meat and cheese, may increase heart disease risk. While the case still remains for reducing meat intake, the story on cheese is different. Studies show that people who eat cheese have a lower risk for ischemic heart disease, coronary heart disease and stroke.

Maintains healthy blood pressure: Cheese can be part of the diet to reduce high blood pressure, likely due to its calcium content. Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet includes two to three servings of dairy foods daily, including reduced fat cheese such as mozzarella.

In recipes, cheese has unparalleled versatility. It offers flavors that range from sharp to buttery to piquant to salty, and it elevates many dishes. Textures can vary from creamy and melty to crisp and crumbly. It’s perfect for pasta, salads, soups, casseroles, omelets and more. Cheese also pairs well with fruit and nuts on charcuterie boards.

When choosing cheese, stick to real cheese instead of processed cheese slices. Real cheese has more vitamins and minerals and much less salt than processed cheese.



May is Physical Fitness and Sports Month.

Managing Menopause

Menopause can bring uncomfortable symptoms. Although some women sail through the “change of life” without much difficulty, others find everything from their sleep to energy levels impacted. There are many symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, brain fog, and mood swings. That’s why understanding what’s going on in your body is important.

Perimenopause begins when women start having symptoms.

Once you’ve gone through 12 consecutive months without a period, perimenopause ends and you begin menopause. Menstruation is typically irregular before totally stopping as menopause progresses. (However, if you’ve had chemotherapy, surgery or hormone treatments due to cancer, menopause may begin abruptly.)

Here are some tips to manage symptoms:

- Avoid spicy foods and limit or eliminate alcohol and caffeine to reduce hot flashes.
- Keep your home, especially your bedroom, on the cool side to help with hot flashes and improve your sleep. Dress lightly and in layers.
- Yoga and swimming are good exercise choices if aerobics spark hot flashes. Regular exercise also can help your mood and sleep.
- Relieve vaginal dryness with over-the-counter vaginal lubricants (don’t use regular skin moisturizers). Talk to your health care provider about prescription options, if needed, including low-dose vaginal estrogen.



Because there are so many possible symptoms, it’s a good idea to see your provider. If symptoms are severe, you may be a candidate for HRT (hormone preplacement therapy). If HRT isn’t right for you, discuss other prescription options to reduce hot flashes and help with sleeping difficulties. Antidepressants can help with symptoms, too.



Another reason to talk to your provider about menopause — osteoporosis (bone thinning) and cardiovascular disease risks rise at this time of life. Make sure you get all the preventative care and regular screening tests, including mammograms, that your provider recommends.

Learn more about menopause at mymenoplan.org.



Tune Up Your Ears

Noise-induced hearing loss is entirely preventable.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that it is permanent and irreversible. And even a single exposure to a loud noise can damage your hearing. Hearing loss can happen gradually over time.

Prevent noise-induced hearing loss at home and at work by following these guidelines:

Keep the volume on headphones, earplugs or speakers at a safe level when listening to music, podcasts or playing video games.

Avoid noisy environments. However, if you can’t, wear hearing protection. You can find earplugs and earmuffs designed for specific activities at hardware and sporting goods stores.

Wear hearing protection when mowing the lawn or using power tools.

Wear earplugs or earmuffs when attending loud events such as music concerts and stay away from the speakers.

Find out if noise at your workplace is hazardous. OSHA’s permissible exposure limit (PEL) is 90 dBA for an eight-hour, time-weighted average (TWA) with a 5 dBA exchange rate. This means every 5 dBA increase halves the safe exposure time — 90 dBA allows just four hours.

Tip: Use a sound level meter app, such as **NIOSH’s Sound Level Meter** at cdc.gov/niosh/noise/about/app.html, to check noise levels.

Reduce your exposure to work-related noise by wearing hearing protection, taking breaks, maintaining equipment and using engineering solutions to reduce noise.

Wear the correct hearing protection. If your job requires working in a noisy environment, choose self-forming, well-fitting earplugs or earmuffs depending on noise level.



Remember to protect young children’s hearing since they cannot do so themselves.

Finally, have your hearing tested if you think you may have hearing loss.



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue’s printable download, **The Mediterranean Table**, is at personalbest.com/extras/25V5tools.

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