



Nutri-Facts

Issue #2

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Greetings!

This issue of Nutri-Facts focuses on tips to help Internet "surfers" evaluate web-based nutrition and health information. With millions of health and nutrition web sites, it is challenging for consumers to decide what is fact and what is fiction. The enclosed consumer handout (one page, front and back) is designed to make that decision less difficult.

There are specific questions that you need to ask when evaluating web sites, based on the type of site you are viewing (personal, informational, business, etc). These questions have been put into a chart for agents to use when evaluating web sites.

Finally, there is a short press release that I hope you will find useful in your newsletters or local newspapers.

For more information on evaluating web pages, you may want to check out this Internet site. <http://sosig.ac.uk/desire/internet-detective.html>. This site is a tutorial designed to help World Wide Web users evaluate Internet sites. If you don't have time for the tutorial, I encourage you to bookmark the Tufts University Nutrition Navigator site. The Nutrition Navigator rates other nutrition web sites and is highly rated among nutrition professionals. See the consumer fact sheet for the web address.

Eat Well!

A Quick Reference for Identifying and Evaluating Web Sites

Evaluating a web site involves looking at several factors. While there is no guaranteed method of evaluating web sites, the more questions you can answer about a web site, the more likely that the information provided is of high quality.

Web Page Category	Purpose of the Web Site	How to Identify	<u>Questions to Ask</u>				
			Authority	Accuracy	Objectivity	Currency	Coverage
Advocacy	To influence public opinion	URL address often ends in .org	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What organization is behind the web site? 2. Can you verify that the organization is legitimate (a phone number or address is given)? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can the references listed be verified in another source? 2. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are the organization's biases clearly stated? 2. If there is any advertising on the page, is it clearly different from the informational content? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell when the information was written, placed, and revised on the web? 2. Can you tell if the material is kept current? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you verify that the web site is not under construction? 2. Can you clearly tell what topics the web page tends to focus on? 3. Does the web page address and identify topics fully? 4. Does the organization present its point of view with well-supported arguments?
Business/Marketing	To promote or sell products	URL address often ends in .com	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What company is behind the web site? 2. Can you verify that the company is legitimate (a phone number or address is provided)? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the company give links to outside sources that can verify company claims? 2. Can the references listed be verified in another source? 3. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If information is given, can you tell why the company is providing it? 2. If there is any advertising, is it clearly different from the informational content? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell when the information was written, placed on the web, and revised? 2. Can you tell if the material is kept current? 3. For any financial information, can you tell if it was filed with the SEC and when? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you verify that the web site is not under construction? 2. Are all of the company's products described adequately? 3. Is the same amount of information given for all divisions of the company?
Personal	Published by an individual; may or may not be linked with another organization	URL address may have various endings like .com or .edu . A tilde (~) is often found in the URL.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell what individual is responsible for the page? 2. Can you verify the credibility of the individual? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can the references listed be verified in another source? 2. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are the person's biases clearly stated? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell when the information was written, placed on the web, and revised? 2. Can you tell if the material is kept current? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you verify that the web site is not under construction?

News	To provide very current information	URL address usually ends in .com	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What organization is behind the web site? 2. Can you verify that the organization is legitimate (phone # or address)? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can the references listed be verified in another source? 2. Do editors monitor what is published? 3. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the informational content clearly distinguished from advertising and opinion contents? 2. Are editorial and opinion pieces clearly labeled? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell when the page was written, when the page was placed on the web, and when the page was last revised? 2. If the information is from a newspaper, can you tell which edition it is from? 3. If the information is from a broadcast, can you tell when (date and time) it was originally broadcast? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there a link to an informational page that describes the coverage of the source? 2. If this is a newspaper web page, is it covered just as extensively in the print version?
Informational	To present factual information	URL address often ends in .edu or .gov	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What organization is behind the web site? 2. Can you verify the organization is legitimate (phone # or address)? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can the references listed be verified in another source? 2. Is the author credible? Can this be verified? 3. Is it clear as to who is responsible for the accuracy of the material? 4. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors? 5. Are charts or graphs with statistical data labeled and easy to read? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the information provided as a public service? 2. Is the information free of advertising? 3. If there is any advertising on the page, is it clearly differentiated from the informational content? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell when the page was written, when the page was placed on the web, and when the page was last revised? 2. Can you tell that the information is kept up to date? 3. If any material is presented in charts or graphs is it stated when the data was collected? 4. If the information is in different editions, can you tell which edition it is from? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you verify that the web site is not under construction? 2. If there is a print version equal to that found on the web page, can you tell whether the entire part of the information is on the web or is it just selected parts? 3. If the material comes from work that is out of copyright, has there been any effort to make the information/web page more current?

Source: *Web Wisdom: How to Evaluate and Create Information Quality on the Web* by Jan Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate.

Prepared by Jenna Anding, PhD, RD, assistant professor and Extension nutrition specialist, October 1999, Revised February 2004. *Educational programs of the Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age or national origin.*





Nutrition and the Information Superhighway: Sorting Fact from the Fiction

With the click of a mouse, consumers can access nutrition information from many sites on the World Wide Web. Many health and nutrition-based web sites provide accurate and up-to-date information but others provide false information or are simply advertisements for dietary supplements. Since information placed on the World Wide Web is not regulated, it is up to consumers to decide if a web site is fact or fiction. This can get tricky but there are ways to spot trustworthy sites when "surfing the net."



Look for Sites:

1. backed by government or professional organizations such as the USDA, the American Dietetic Association, or the American Cancer Society.
2. with resources and information from credible experts. Web sites that have an address or phone number for that person allow consumers to contact him/her for more information.
3. that provide information with references that can be checked for accuracy.
4. which are updated on a regular basis so the information presented is current.

Be careful of sites that:

1. sell herbs or other dietary supplements (biased or incomplete information may be presented to get consumers to buy their products).
2. use personal stories or uncheckable references (reliable nutrition information is based on science).
3. make unrealistic statements about nutrition (ex. "Everybody needs a vitamin supplement").
4. use words like "conspiracy" or "poison" (reputable sites don't use scare tactics to promote sound nutrition).
5. promote personal opinions or political agendas (the information presented may be biased)



A Sample of Internet Sources of Sound Nutrition & Health Information

The United States Department of Agriculture (Learn about the Food Guide Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans)

<http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/>

Texas Cooperative Extension, Family and Consumer Sciences

<http://fcs.tamu.edu>

Tufts University Nutrition Navigator - this site rates other nutrition web sites!

<http://navigator.tufts.edu/>

The American Dietetic Association - Your link to nutrition and health

<http://www.eatright.org/>

The International Food Information Council Foundation

<http://www.ific.org>

Food and Drug Administration, Active Aging - A web site for senior citizens. Has additional links to the National Institute on Aging.

<http://www.fda.gov/oc/olderpersons/>

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration - information about food labeling & dietary supplements

<http://www.fda.gov/>

The American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/>

The American Heart Association

<http://www.americanheart.org/>

The American Diabetes Association

<http://www.diabetes.org/>

National Institutes of Health

<http://www.nih.gov/> (Click on Health Information)

References:

Food Insight, March/April 1999

Web Wisdom: How to Evaluate and Create Information Quality on the Web, by Jan Alexander & Marsha Ann Tate

Prepared by Jenna Anding, PhD, RD, assistant professor and Extension nutrition specialist, October 1999, Revised February 2004. Educational programs of the Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.



News release

February 2, 2004

Contact person: _____, County Agent

Don't Wipe Out when Surfing the "Net" for Nutrition and Health Information

Move over physicians. The growing interest in nutrition and health has lead many individuals to venture into cyberspace for health-related information. In fact, a national survey of one thousand Americans found that nearly one-third of them had used the Internet to obtain health and nutrition information - a trend that continues to grow.

The World Wide Web has enormous potential to give consumers the information they need to take charge of their health - thanks, in part, to government agencies, professional organizations, and credible experts committed to arming consumers with reliable information. On the other hand, unrestricted publishing on the Web has led to the appearance of inaccurate information and undocumented nutrition and health claims. With a little bit of "surfing" consumers can read that fluorescent lights leach vitamins from your body and bee pollen corrects body chemistry. Although such information is little more than entertainment, many consumers fail to recognize that such stories are without any scientific merit. In fact such information may be harmful - especially if it leads consumers to adopt harmful health practices. Because there are no gatekeepers that govern what is launched into cyberspace, the appearance of false or deceptive information is likely to continue.

When searching for reliable nutrition and health information on the Web, sorting the fact from the fiction can be a challenge to many consumers. According to Jenna Anding, PhD, RD, a registered dietitian and nutrition specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension, "consumers should start their information searches by visiting sites which are backed by government or professional organizations such as the USDA, the American Dietetic Association, or the International Food Information Council". These organizations have experts on their staff and promote reliable nutrition and health information based on science. Their web sites are kept current, provide links to other reliable sites, and are likely to provide information with references that can be checked for accuracy. On the other hand, web sites that use personal stories to promote health and nutrition remedies, make unrealistic statements about nutrition, or use words like "conspiracy" or "poison" should be viewed with caution. Even if the information is valid, you may not be getting the complete picture.

What about personal web sites? According to Anding, many experts have their own web sites and promote valuable information. Consumers who visit personal web site should look for credentials as well as references that can be checked. For example, if a person claims that he/she is a registered dietitian, consumers can verify that credential by contacting the Commission on Dietetic Registration by phone (312-899-0040 Ext. 5500), by Fax (312-899-4772), or by electronic mail (cdr@eatright.org). Persons interested in learning more about a physician's credentials are

encouraged to check *The Directory of Physicians in the United State* which is published by the American Medical Association. This directory includes information on individuals that hold an MD or DO degree, regardless of licensure status and can be found in most large libraries.

Remember, just because information is published on the Internet does not automatically mean it is true. If you or your family decides to use online information to make health decisions, learning how to sort that fact from fiction is important. Don't be afraid to ask questions about the site and don't hesitate to check credentials or references. Finally, if there are any doubts about the accuracy of the information, be sure to check with a registered dietitian, physician or health care provider for a second opinion.

For more information on identifying reliable web sites for nutrition and health information, contact _____, county Extension agent at _____ (phone number).