



Be careful of the hype on health

Health is one of the most prized possessions. Like any possession, it can be lost or even stolen if we don't protect it. There are some widely accepted ways to protect health such as not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight and staying physically active. But beyond these basics, there is an abundance of hype about how to protect your health.

Separating fact from fiction is not always easy. Determining what relates to you can be challenging. As a consequence, many of our health-related decisions are based on personal beliefs.

This is why scientists conduct double-blind studies on drugs or dietary supplements.

"Double-blind" means that neither the researchers nor the study participants know who is taking the real drug or the placebo until after the study is completed.

Studies comparing different diets can't usually follow this placebo model because the participants are aware of what they are eating.

Question: If you follow the latest "miracle diet" and you feel better, doesn't that mean that the diet "works"?

Answer: No. It is too easy to fool yourself. You might feel better in spite of the miracle diet because of other things that changed in your life.

Q: But, if I change my diet and nothing else and I feel better, doesn't that mean that the diet is good for me?

A: Frequently, a change in diet goes so far in the right direction that it is out of balance in a new way. Initially the person feels better but eventually it takes a toll.

Take the case of the heavy meat eater who switches to a vegetarian diet with no animal foods. They have changed in the

right direction, but unless they are careful in selecting the proper foods and dietary supplements, new health problems can develop.

The most common consequences are deficiencies in minerals like iron, zinc and calcium along with vitamin B-12. In addition, if our former meat eater is not active and has low calorie needs, his or her new diet could provide too little protein. The negative effects of these deficiencies can take many months or even years to become apparent, but when they do, the effects can be quite debilitating and bewildering.

Good nutrition is not "black and white." Striking the right balance requires thinking in terms of proportions and shades of gray.

Remember, don't believe everything you think! It is too easy to fool yourself when it comes to health

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