STAYWELL

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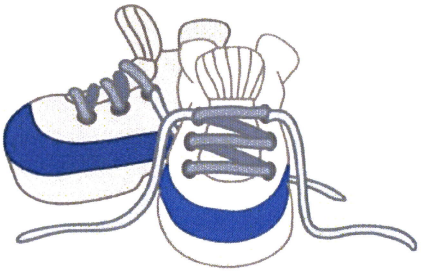
Fact vs Fiction/Health Sorting Amid the Myths

Years ago a young boy came and showed me the latest and greatest running shoes he had just obtained. I asked the boy if his new shoes made him run faster. Without hesitation he lunged down and immediately burst into high gear running as fast as he could. When the boy came back he was beaming from the sudden magical speed these new shoes provided him. With the new shoes, he was a speedster, without them, he was slow and snaillike. Having that specific brand of shoe endorsed by a specific star, the boy was faster, stronger, and more athletic. Right?



Endorsements and claims are huge selling factors in the United States. Claims such as; scientifically studied, endorsed by physicians, natural, pure, healthy, etc., all lead people to make assumptions. The assumption part is what creates the problem.

Myth: If a little is good then more is better.
Dietary supplements frequently cross this line and mislead consumers. A few years ago there was a Staywell newsletter about the problems that come from taking large doses of vitamins and minerals. Each vitamin and mineral was broken down with a list of what happens in the body when a person is deficient, along with the symptoms he/she could have if too much of a vitamin or mineral was taken. "Mega dosing" is one of those myths consumers fell into, creating a boom in the vitamin and mineral market.

Fact: Vitamins and minerals can be toxic if taken in excess. After several years, long-term studies began to show that "mega dosing" was either completely inefficient, or could cause health problems.

Myth: If it can't be said on TV it is not true.
At one time or another most of you have seen in a Staywell class a certain video clip. The narrator of a commercial was making an outrageous claim that "you can eat all you want and still lose weight" with their product and then concludes by saying, "we could not say it on TV if it was not true."

Fact: Health supplements have guidelines but are not regulated like medications. The result is, many claims that are made are not true. For example, a label that reads "scientifically studied" does not mean that science proved it worked.

Claims are made that the ingredients in a prostate supplement have been "scientifically studied." This is true, but consumers fill in the rest and assume this means "scientifically proven to cure prostate issues." The truth could be that the ingredients were studied and tested for its effectiveness in improving milk production in goats. Thus making the "scientifically studied" claim true. Another misconception is that it was studied for prostate and honestly states "scientifically studied." The consumer believes that it worked, when in reality the supplement ingredients were studied, but the results of the study might actually mean it did nothing. Some may think this could not happen. Be careful, I have found these type of wild outlandish statements to actually happen.

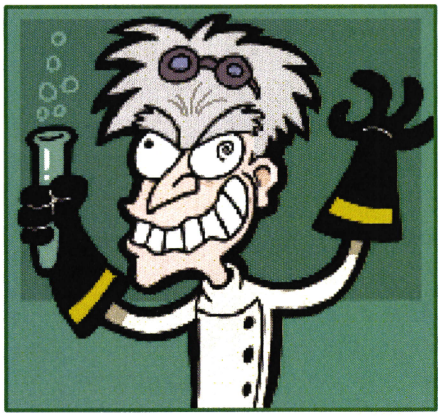
Myth: Vitamins and minerals do not interact with medicines and foods.

Fact: This myth can lead to serious health conditions. For example statins. If an individual is taking a statin he/she is not supposed to consume large amounts of grapefuit or grapefruit juice. The reason is, the chemicals in grapefruit interfere with an individual's body and the body's ability to break down statins. Thus, the body does not absorb them. When a person continually takes the statin it begins to build up toxic levels in the blood and causes an overdose leading to the possibility of side effects and serious health issues.

This is why educating ourselves about medications and how one simple food can react is so important.

A great resource is the website www.drugs.com. On this website a person can read about all the possible interactions with foods, supplements, etc. Individuals can also read about all common and less common side effects. Any time a person gets a new drug or supplement he/she should read about the active ingredients and learn what the drug will interact with or what should be avoided when taking a specific drug.

This leads to the biggest myth of all "Natural." Many people take natural supplements, but this does not always mean it is safe, nor does it mean the supplement does what it is supposed to do. For example, opium. This is natural, but is not safe. Scientifically, opium has been studied extensively and has been processed for certain medications, but taking the natural version does not mean it is safe.



Natural anti-inflammatories is another example. The medicine version is Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatories (NSAID). Anti-inflammatory substances whether natural or not, all do the same thing and work on the same mechanisms in the body. They stop inflammation. If it does the same thing in the body and impacts the same systems, it can also cause the same problems if taken too much, too long, or with other medicines. Again, natural does not mean it doesn't have side effects. Medical professionals and pharmacists are encouraging patients to compile a list of supplements and medications being taken to avoid serious interactions that could cause side effects. Natural does not always mean safe that is something we as consumers assume. Refer to the website mentioned above. It is a great resource along with the local pharmacies.

What does natural really mean? When a person eats an orange, does that consist of natural ingredients? If an individual drinks fresh squeezed orange juice is that natural? What if the juice has other ingredients such as sugar? Is sugar a natural ingredient? The claim could be made that it is natural because of the natural ingredients. If a drug is manufactured from natural ingredients and produced in pill form, why don't we accept it as natural? Consumers accept a supplement broken down and processed into a pill as natural, but is it? A piece of fruit is natural, a pill containing vitamin C is not all natural.

Now don't get me wrong I am not condemning natural products, but just trying to help us as consumers be aware and not fall into the myths associated with labeling. Be careful, think it through, and always research all possible interactions and the side effects.

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