

How to Evaluate Health Information in a Noisy Wellness World

A Practical Guide to Discernment in Health and Nutrition

We're bombarded by health information, but few of us were ever taught how to think critically about what we're told.

In the health and wellness space, the loudest voices often shape the narrative. That's why cultivating discernment—the ability to filter information, ask better questions, and think for yourself—is essential.

If you've ever felt confused by health headlines, wellness trends, or contradictory advice, these questions can help guide your decisions. Start by considering the source of the information itself.

1. Consider who funded the study?

Not all research is impartial. Ask:


- Was the study funded by an independent organization—or by a company with a vested interest?
- Is the funding source disclosed?
- Does the study benefit the sponsor's product, position, or public image?
- Have the authors received funding or consulting fees from the sponsor in the past?
- Would the outcome of the study impact a company's ability to market or sell something?

Funding doesn't automatically discredit a study, but it adds valuable context.

Real-World Example: Sugar Industry Influence

In the 1960s, the Sugar Research Foundation (now the Sugar Association) funded Harvard scientists to publish research downplaying the link between sugar and heart disease—while shifting the blame to fat.

The funding wasn't disclosed, and some of the scientists later played key roles in shaping U.S. dietary guidelines. For decades, sugar escaped scrutiny while low-fat diets dominated.

 **JAMA Internal Medicine (2016)** published a historical analysis of internal sugar industry documents that revealed this influence.

 [Sugar Industry and Coronary Heart Disease Research](#)

This is a classic case of how industry-funded research can shape public health policy—even when the science is incomplete or distorted.

2. What kind of study is it?

Not all studies are equal in quality or reliability. Learn to differentiate:

- Randomized controlled trial (RCT): The gold standard.
- Observational study: Can suggest associations, but can't prove cause and effect.
- Animal study: Useful for exploring mechanisms, but doesn't directly apply to humans.
- Self-reported survey: Prone to memory bias and subjectivity.

Always ask: How strong is the evidence?

3. Does it show correlation or causation?

A headline might say, "Eating X is linked to Y," but that doesn't mean X causes Y.

- Correlation means two things occur together.
- Causation means one directly causes the other.

Most media reports blur this line.

4. Is this one study—or part of a broader pattern?

One study can be interesting, but patterns across many high-quality studies are more trustworthy.

Look for:

- Systematic reviews: These summarize findings from multiple studies on the same topic, using strict methods to reduce bias.
- Meta-analyses: A type of systematic review that combines data from several studies to produce a more powerful, pooled result.
- Repeated findings in large trials: Results that have been replicated in multiple randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with large participant groups over time.

The more consistent the evidence across high-quality research, the more confident we can be in the conclusion.

5. Is the presenter selling certainty?

Be cautious of anyone who:

- Speaks in absolutes.
- Dismisses opposing views without explanation.
- Offers "one answer" for everyone.

True experts acknowledge nuance. Oversimplified certainty is often a red flag.

6. What's the reasoning behind the claim?

Use first principles thinking:

- Why do I believe this?
- Is this based on solid data, repetition, or just reputation?
- What would convince me I might be wrong?

The goal is clarity—not rigidity.

7. Am I comfortable with uncertainty?

- Health and nutrition involve probabilities, not guarantees.
- Science evolves. What's recommended today may shift as new data emerges.
- That doesn't mean previous advice was wrong—just that it was incomplete.
- Discernment means staying curious, flexible, and open to better evidence.

Keep This In Mind

- Anecdotes aren't universal truths.
- The strongest evidence is repeatable, well-controlled, and peer-reviewed.
- Emotional certainty is not the same as scientific clarity.

Next time someone makes a bold health claim, don't just ask: "Is it true?"

Ask: "How do they know—and how do I?"

That's where real discernment begins—and where you become empowered to make choices that truly serve your health, and where you start advocating for your own well-being with clarity, confidence, and strength.