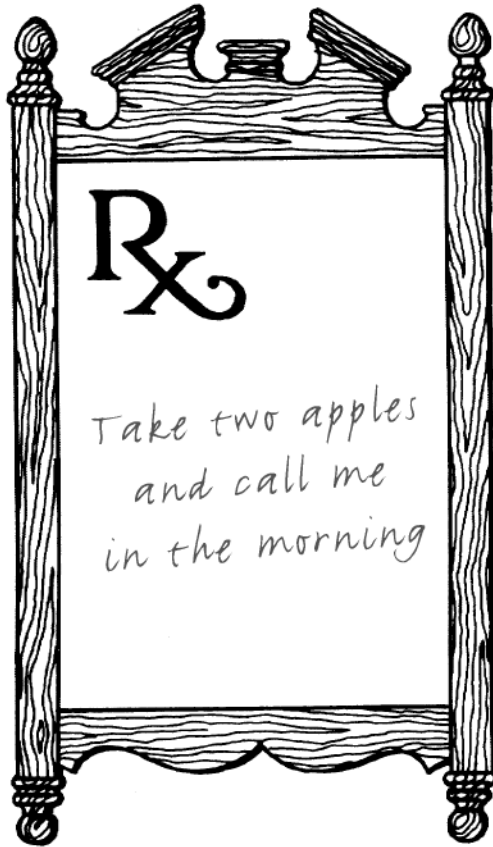

NUTRITION FACT, FAD, FABLE AND FALLACY— A RANT

BY SHARON SALOMON, MS, RD

Does this sound like your morning ritual: You sprinkle flax seed on your soymilk-moistened, whole-grain cereal and wash down your daily antioxidant supplement with pomegranate-flavored green tea. If that's how you start your day, then you probably feel pretty good about what you are doing for your health. But is it worth the time to grind the flax each morning? Should you be spending the extra money on the supplements? Will you live longer because you've switched to soymilk?

Many of us get our health and nutrition information from our friends, the people we trust. If you go to the gym regularly (and I hope you do!) then that's where you probably hear about the latest health fads. Two of the members at my fitness center—a buff guy in his late 40s and a lanky guy in his early 40s—always trade workout tips. Buff usually drinks a glass of brown sludge before his workout. Lanky decided to add Buff's pre-workout beverage to his routine. I don't know what's in the drink—it sure doesn't look appetizing—but I will tell you that Buff is very buff and Lanky is way less lanky than he was before he started drinking the sludge. Should I conclude that the drink is responsible for the improvement in Lanky's physique?

We probably all remember the oat bran craze of the '80s. I baked yucky oat bran muffins for breakfast every day for months. I even sweetened them with honey and used applesauce in place of fat. Those muffins were gross, but healthy! So where's oat bran now? Well, it's in your oatmeal as part of the whole oat grain—where it always was. We couldn't possibly have eaten enough oatmeal every day to get the effect on cholesterol reported by the scientific studies, so manufacturers isolated the bran, the part that had been shown to reduce cholesterol, hoping that eating just the bran would contribute to improving blood lipid profiles more quickly. When oat bran was in vogue, supermarket managers kept the boxes locked away because customers were fighting over them in the aisles. I wonder if anyone is trying to sell her old oat bran on eBay?



Yogurt-covered walnuts. Walnuts are good for us, with fiber, antioxidants, protein and healthy oils. Yogurt? No one has ever had to defend the health properties of yogurt. But is that really yogurt on the walnuts? The ingredients in the yogurt coating usually include sugar, palm kernel oil, skim milk powder, skim yogurt powder and lecithin. So what's in regular yogurt? Only milk and the bacteria that make the milk into yogurt. It's more accurate to think of yogurt-covered nuts and fruits as candy-coated snacks. If you like them, eat them because they are tasty—not because you expect to get the benefits of yogurt.

Sometimes we have to step back and take a look at the origin of the information. Why are we so eager to take health advice from entertainers? We must not value education, knowledge and experience because one word from a well-known talk-show host sends America to the bookstores and supermarkets. Do we really believe a wealthy, privileged woman whips up

her own low-fat meals and works out alone on the treadmill while the laundry spins in the dryer?

A recent newspaper headline, "Ice Cream May Aid Fertility for Some," caught my attention because I'm an ice cream lover. A researcher surveyed women about their ice cream eating habits. He found that the ones who eat ice cream regularly seemed to be more fertile. Before you crank up that ice cream maker, you should know a little bit more about the study results. We know that dieting reduces fertility in some women because it can interfere with ovulation. Women who eat ice cream are probably not dieting, so the increase in fertility might not have anything to do with ice cream but rather to their general lifestyle. Sometimes newspapers, magazines and television reports do not give us the whole story.

Garlic may not really reduce cholesterol. Antioxidant supplements may shorten and not lengthen life or protect against cancer. And, sadly, French women do indeed get fat. In fact, they are getting fat at rates so alarming that the French

government recently approved a diet pill not yet approved in the U.S.

What's up with all of this? One study yields "definitive" results; another doesn't agree. If you read or hear a report that something has been "proven" then shut your ears, close your eyes and walk away. Scientists do not prove stuff. They come up with an idea (a hypothesis), they test their idea (carry out a scientific study using control groups and other safeguards to make sure their research is reliable and valid) and perform rigorous statistical analyses to make certain that the results are not due to chance. Then they publish the study results in a peer-reviewed journal that has rigorous editorial guidelines. The results of the study may support the hypothesis or may not. That is, *support* the hypothesis—not *prove* the hypothesis.

If the study results are newsworthy, then the media will want to report the results. Here's where things start to get cloudy. Each scientific discipline has its own jargon and the statistical analyses are usually long boring sections of published studies. So reporters might cut to the interesting stuff in the results section where they read the phrase "supports the hypothesis," meaning that the results of the study were not due to chance and that whatever the intervention was did support the idea. In translating the results to the public, the language may change from "support" to "prove" and off we run to buy a flat of wheat grass for smoothies.

Is it possible that today's fad may turn out to be tomorrow's nutrition recommendation? Is it possible that present accepted dietary regimens will be debunked tomorrow? Yes, to both questions. That's the nature of scientific inquiry. Each time we learn something, we see ways to revise previous studies, so we may get different results. The most exciting outcome, however, would be to get the same results even with different methods. Then we'd know that we might have found something enduring.

Don't get me wrong. There is pretty good evidence for flax seed and pomegranate juice and green tea. I'm not telling you to toss your supplements or pour your soymilk down the drain. I just want you to be a bit more skeptical. Why is Lanky's physique fast approaching Buff's? Could it be the potion they're both drinking? Or could it be that Lanky is working out harder than before?

Here's some enduring nutrition information: Eat lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Avoid highly processed foods. Get regular physical activity and plenty of sleep. Not very sexy advice, is it? What if that's not good enough? What if you want an advantage or you want some insurance? Then I suggest you choose carefully. Know the source of the information. Find out if there have been any troublesome occurrences associated with the regimen. Be informed. Be skeptical.

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TRADITIONAL SAUTEED CHOLLA BUDS

One of Frances' favorite foods, cholla buds have a unique flavor that includes tones ranging from artichoke to asparagus. Very nutritious and tasty, they make a healthy side dish for any meal.

- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 pieces broken dried chiles (optional)
- 1 cup boiled or roasted cholla buds
- 1 tsp. olive oil or other oil
- 1/2 cup cooked tepary beans (optional)

In a frying pan, cook onions in the oil until lightly browned. If using chiles, add these now and cook until the peppers darken.

Add cholla buds and cook for five minutes or until they have absorbed all the oil and are warmed through. If they seem dry, add more oil and continue cooking.

If using beans, add these now and cook until they are warmed through.

O'ODHAM WHITE TEPARY BEAN STEW

Tepary beans love slow cooking. This recipe produces a slightly sweet, delicious rich broth and is ideal for a crock pot. Frances always kept a pot bubbling on the stove.

- 1 cup dried white tepary beans, rinsed and picked through
- 10 cups of water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 pound oxtails, beef short ribs, deer or rabbit

Place beans, water and salt in a stockpot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 1 1/2 hours.

Add meat to the bean mixture, cover and cook for one more hour, or until beans are tender and the meat is falling off the bone.

If using a crock pot, place water and all other ingredients in the pot, cover and set to high. Cook for 8 hours or until the meat is falling off the bone and the beans are tender.

Recipes Courtesy of Frances Manuel, San Pedro Village