# Finding Nutrition Information You Can Trust

## Booklet

A resource for community organizations who offer food programs or talk about food and nutrition

Saskatchewan Health Authority
Food Mentoring Toolkit

**The purpose of this booklet is to provide more detailed information on finding credible nutrition information. It is not designed for the purpose of following along with the video.**

**The information provided in this booklet, and all Food Mentoring Toolkit resources, is intended for general education purposes and should not replace medical advice. Consult a registered dietitian or qualified health professional before making significant changes to diet or lifestyle.**

# Finding Nutrition Information You Can Trust

## What's ahead in this booklet

- Tips for determining if nutrition information is reliable
- How to identify potentially misleading or false nutrition information
- Credible sources of nutrition information
- Commonly asked questions

## Key messages

1. Before following or sharing online nutrition advice, look closely at the information you find.
2. Check that the information is coming from a reliable source.
3. If the advice sounds too good to be true, it likely is.

**Words matter:**

You will notice throughout the Food Mentoring Toolkit that food neutral language is used. If you would like to learn more about this topic, here is a link to the Food Neutrality handout.

# Supporting Materials

## Handouts

- Credible Nutrition Information Checklist

## Facilitator guide:

If you are interested in speaking to clients about this topic, please email publichealthnutrition@saskhealthauthority.ca to request a facilitator guide. The guide includes a step-by-step plan for watching the video as a group and working through group activities and discussions.

If you would like to watch a video on this topic, visit the Finding Nutrition Information section on the Food Mentoring Toolkit home page. For more information, there are additional resources listed at the end of this chapter.

# Finding Nutrition Information You Can Trust

With an endless amount of nutrition advice and conflicting messages available, knowing who and what to believe is challenging. It is important to recognize that much of the nutrition information available online can be incorrect, biased or misleading. The fact that information is widely shared, or repeated, does not guarantee it is based on accurate facts.

**Explore more**

Nutrition is a science, not an opinion.

The science of food and nutrition evolves with time, making it hard to keep up with current research. The internet and social media are overflowing with individuals claiming they are sharing the latest and best nutrition advice. Wrong conclusions can be taken from low-quality research studies and then passed along as being 'supported by science'. Recommendations can also be based on personal beliefs or experiences, rather than proven facts. Although it may seem harmless, sharing these kinds of misinformation can be costly. It can cause mistrust, mental and financial strain, and can be harmful to health.

Help stop the spread of misinformation. When looking for or sharing nutrition information, consider the following questions to determine if it should be trusted or not.

## Who wrote the information?

- Look for the author's credentials to determine if the content is written by qualified medical, scientific, or credible health professionals.
- The most credible nutrition experts are Registered Dietitians (RD) and individuals with a Masters or PhD in nutrition science. Registered dietitians are provincially regulated professionals who have specific training and a university degree in food and nutrition.[3]

- The title of dietitian is protected by law, just like a nurse, pharmacist, or doctor. Public health nutritionists are also usually registered dietitians but always look for the initials RD or PD to identify them.
- Check out a website's 'About Us' section to learn more about the people, company, or industry responsible for the information.

## Is the information based on personal stories, testimonials, or proven facts?

- The more novel an idea is, and the more we like it or see it repeated, the more likely we are to believe it - even if it is not true. It is nice to hear success stories, but it is not proof that something works or that it is safe and effective for everyone.
- Success stories may intentionally try to appeal to their readers' emotions and can be misleading as they are often based on opinion or personal experience instead of evidence. They are not reliable sources of nutrition information.

- Nutrition advice should be based on the best available scientific research. Registered dietitians and scientists who specialize in nutrition research have the knowledge and skills to determine if nutrition information and advice have the evidence to support it.

## Is the advice based on a single study or a few research studies? Did the studies involve humans or animals?[1] Who funded the study?

- The quality of the study matters. Human randomized controlled trials (RCT) are among those of the best quality. [4] In these types of studies, similar people are randomly assigned to groups to measure how effective a treatment or intervention is.
- The more people included in the study and the longer the study time, the stronger the results will be. Look for studies that are not funded by industry to reduce the risk of biased information.

- Advice based on one single study, even if it is a high quality RCT study, is not enough evidence that something is fact. The more high-quality studies that show the same results, the stronger the evidence is that something is true. Health professionals look for strong evidence, found in **systematic reviews** or a **meta-analysis**, as these are based on multiple similar studies related to a specific question or theory.

## Is there a promise for an easy fix like fast weight-loss, a super food or a miracle cure?[1]

- Look more critically at health information or articles that claim a pill or food will cure illnesses or produce immediate results.
- Making changes to your health usually means a long-term commitment to eating well, being active, and adopting healthy lifestyle habits.[1]

**Explore more**

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

- Talk with a trusted health care professional about what you have learned before making any changes in your health care.

## Does the advice include buying special products or replacing foods with supplements?

- Be wary of advertisements selling products that claim to improve your health, such as special foods, supplements, protein powders, diet pills, and diet books or plans. These may use unproven or misleading claims to promote their products.
- Some products or supplements can be dangerous. They may have unwanted side effects or interact with prescription medications. Speak with a dietitian, pharmacist or doctor to learn more.

- Food is the best source of nutrients. Special products and supplements are usually not needed to improve health.

## Does the information focus on or avoid certain nutrients, foods or an entire food category?

- Be wary of information that vilifies certain types of foods and encourages avoidance of entire food categories (i.e. grains or carbohydrates) or only focuses on eating specific foods (i.e. protein) for health.
- Avoiding any food category increases the risk of missing out on important nutrients and creating a negative relationship with food.
- No one food has all the nutrients needed. We need a variety of foods to meet our nutritional needs.

## Is the information reliable and when was the information written?

- Registered dietitians, government authorities such as Health Canada, provincial health authority websites, or national non-profit organizations such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation or Canadian Cancer Society are sources of reliable nutrition information (see Commonly Asked Questions section).
- Look for the date the information was written, reviewed or updated to find out how current the information is. Reliable websites should include the most current, evidence-based nutrition information.
- Credible health information is based on scientific evidence, so reliable authors usually provide links to the evidence and references.
- Check for disclaimers and read the fine print. The contents of a website may be based upon the opinion of a person, funded by food or drug industry (potentially biased), or state that the products are not approved by government standards.

# Commonly Asked Questions

1. **What can we do as an organization to help clients access credible nutrition information?**

   - Only share information from credible health professionals (see page 3 of this chapter and the website links below for examples). This helps to build client trust in your organization.
   - Avoid liking or sharing social media posts if you are unsure of their accuracy and credibility.
   - Call out those who spread misinformation online. Correct them with credible information sources if possible.
   - Follow organizations such as those listed below and share their posts with your followers to try to drown out misinformation.
   - Provide food literacy programming using the Food Mentoring Toolkit to build skills and resiliency.
   - Consult a registered dietitian or public health nutritionist in your area if you require additional resources on nutrition-related topics or if you have questions about nutrition information.

**2. What are some examples of websites with reliable nutrition information?**

- **General nutrition websites**
  - Canada's Food Guide https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/
  - Dietitians of Canada
    - UnlockFood.ca https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/default.aspx
    - Cookspiration http://www.cookspiration.com

- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Nutrition and Eating https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/your-health/conditions-diseases-services/school-food-and-nutrition
- Government of Canada - Food and Nutrition https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/food-nutrition.html

- **Websites on specific conditions**
  - Arthritis Society Canada https://arthritis.ca
  - Canadian Cancer Society https://www.cancer.ca
  - Canadian Paediatric Society - Caring for Kids https://caringforkids.cps.ca/
  - Canadian Society of Intestinal Research https://www.badgut.org
  - Celiac Association of Canada https://www.celiac.ca
  - Diabetes Canada https://www.diabetes.ca/
  - National Eating Disorder Information Centre https://nedic.ca and Bridgepoint Center for Eating Disorder Recovery http://bridgepointcenter.ca/
  - Food Allergy Canada https://foodallergycanada.ca/
  - Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada https://www.heartandstroke.ca/
  - Hypertension Canada https://hypertension.ca/
  - Lung Sask – Healthy Eating https://www.lungsask.ca/lungs/lung-diseases/healthy-living-lung-disease/healthy-eating
  - Osteoporosis Canada https://osteoporosis.ca

# Additional Reading

How to find food and nutrition information you can trust – UnlockFood.ca

What is a Dietitian? – UnlockFood.ca

Learn about dietitians – Dietitians of Canada

# References

1. Dietitians of Canada. How to find food and nutrition information you can trust. UnlockFood.ca; 2020 [cited 2025 Feb 13]. Available from: https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Nutrition-Month/How-to-find-food-and-nutrition-information-you-can.aspx

2. Dietitians of Canada. What is a dietitian? UnlockFood.ca; 2025 [cited 2025 Feb 13]. Available from: https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/About-Dietitians/What-is-a-Dietitian.aspx

3. Dietitians of Canada. Learn About Dietitians. Dietitians of Canada; 2025 [cited 2025 Feb 13]. Available from: https://www.dietitians.ca/About/Learn-About-Dietitians

4. Sense About Science. Understanding Health Research – A tool for making sense of health studies. Sense About Science; 2016 [cited 2025 Apr 7]. Available from: https://www.understandinghealthresearch.org/useful-information/are-some-types-of-evidence-better-than-others-22

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