

# **Consumer Awareness Skills**

## **Lesson#2.6**

**Lesson Description:**

The marketing and advertising of food influences people's food choices. In this lesson you will analyze different information sources to gain an understanding of how to separate nutrition fact from fiction. You will also become aware of what constitutes food myths and fads, and learn where to get accurate information about nutrition.

# Developing Consumer Skills

## Consumer Awareness

### Separating Fact from Fiction

Each day, dozens of media messages about food and nutrition come your way. With this wealth of information, some of it conflicting, how can you tell what to believe and what to disregard?



# Consumer Awareness

## Developing Consumer Skills

Part of the answer to the question is mastering two food-consumer skills — **critical thinking and communication**. Those skills constitute the first step in learning how to separate fact from fiction.

**As a critical thinker**, you learn to look for the “angle” in a given message. When you see an ad, for example, you are alert to the fact that advertisers have something to sell and, therefore, may not be the most reliable information sources.

**As an effective communicator**, you learn to consider the source of the information. You become able to discriminate between legitimate sources and unsubstantiated claims.





# Consumer Awareness

## Going to the Source

How often do you read articles or hear news stories about food that contain phrases such as “a recent study shows” or “Scientists have found”? On the surface, such reports seem believable enough. How can you tell whether to accept the information at face value?

Here are some tips:

- ☐ **Check the original source**, when possible. Credible research is carried out by qualified scientists and recognized institutions. The results are then reported in scientific and professional journals. Think twice about research that is attributed to unnamed sources.
- ☐ **Be alert for bias** on the part of the people who performed or reported on the study
- ☐ **Read past the headlines.** Headlines are designed to get your attention and may be misleading. Read the whole report before you arrive at a conclusion.

# Consumer Awareness

## Some Tips:

- Consider the body of evidence. Is the report based on preliminary findings? If so, it may be too early to make any changes in your eating habits. Wait until more evidence has been gathered.
- Consider the **study design**—the approach used by researchers to investigate a claim. Some studies, known as **clinical trials**, are performed on human subjects. Others are designed around animal subjects. Findings involving animals aren't always reliable.

# Consumer Awareness

## Making Wise Food Choices

When you are examining food packages, flyers, or magazines, look for the following:

- ☐ Bias. Does the source stand to make a profit by convincing you to buy the product? Is the source really interested in your health?
- ☐ Evidence. How much research has been done, where, and by whom?
- ☐ Be like a detective and look for clues that tell you whether the claim is fact or fiction.

# The Purpose of Food Marketing & Ads

The purpose of food advertising and marketing is to sell a product. Whether it is a magazine about food, an actual food product, or a related product, such as toothpaste, the marketing company or ad agency wants to **shape your beliefs and buying habits**. Food advertisers and marketers want to **influence how you spend your money**.

**Food advertisers and marketers attempt to convince you to buy their products in several ways:**

- ☐ They entertain you with commercials with **celebrities**
- ☐ They include **free giveaways** with their products, for instance, computer games in cereal boxes
- ☐ They sell you an **image or a lifestyle**
- ☐ They use phrases like “preliminary studies show...” and dress up an actor in a white lab coat to say the words, creating the impression that she or he is a **scientific researcher**. Consequently, infomercials can often look like news reports.



# Consumer Awareness and Food Marketing

Here are some shopping hints for you as a consumer of food and food-related products.

- Read labels carefully to determine ingredients. How much salt or sugar has been added to the product? Does the cereal, for example, actually contain calcium, or is it in the milk that you add to the product? When you read the label, does the fruit-flavored food actually contain fruit? **Be label wise.**
- **Make a grocery list to help you resist instore marketing and advertising of products.** That way, at the end of a shopping trip, you will find fewer items bought on impulse in your grocery cart that you really don't need. A grocery list will also help you resist the products you will find all around you as you wait in the store line-up. How did that chocolate bar sneak in there?
- Check the **reliability** of the product's sources, who is guaranteeing what and why? What must you do if you are not satisfied with the product? Is the company that is making the promises in this country?

# Consumer Awareness and Food Marketing

- Beware of free giveaways inside products. Is the advertiser trying to get you or a child to buy a product by including free games or contests? Are you buying the product because you want it, or has the free toy inside attracted you?
- Free samples of food in grocery are another way advertisers tempt you to buy their products. If you go shopping when you are hungry, that free sample of sausage tastes very good. You may end up walking out of the grocery store with a box of them. That is what the advertiser is counting on.



# Food Myths and Fads

When Margaret has a cold, her mother gives her a mixture of hot tea and fruit juice flavored with cloves. Margaret's mother learned this remedy from her own mother. While this treatment might make Margaret feel better, it has no medicinal value. Its use as a cure for her cold is little more than a **food myth**.

Where do food myths originate? Some, like Margaret's grandmother's cure for the common cold, are handed down through generations of the same family. Others are spread by word of mouth. When a food or nutrition myth becomes so widespread as to be embraced by large groups, it becomes a **food fad**.

Consumer skills can help you avoid becoming the victim of food myths or fads. When you are confronted with a curious food or nutrition 'fact', keep a healthy skepticism. Ask the individual what his or her source is. Then investigate the source yourself and/or seek a qualified opinion.

Remember, your health is your responsibility. Separating nutrition fact from fiction is an important part of exercising that responsibility.

# Food Myths and Fads

**MYTH: An apple a day keeps the doctor away.**



Apples are packed with vitamin C and fiber, both of which are important to long-term health, but they aren't all you need. If certain viruses or bacteria get into your system, an apple will unfortunately do nothing to protect you.

Go ahead and get that flu shot, even if you eat apples.



# Food Myths and Fads

**MYTH: Eating food within 5 seconds of dropping it on the floor is safe.**



It's the worst when something you really wanted to eat falls on the floor. But if you grab it in five seconds, it's ok, right? The five-second-rule isn't a real thing. Bacteria can contaminate a food within milliseconds. And moist food attract more bacteria than dry foods, but there's no "safe duration."

# Food Myths and Fads

**MYTH: A juice cleanse will detoxify you after an eating binge.**



Your body naturally removes harmful chemicals through the liver, kidneys, and gastrointestinal tract — there's nothing about juice that will hurry that process along. Juicing mainly just removes digestion-aiding fiber from fruits and vegetables. Also consider that many sugary fruit juices are as bad for you as sodas.

# Food Myths and Fads

**MYTH: ‘Calories in, calories out’ is all that matters when it comes to weight loss**



Though burning more energy than you take in is the most important factor when it comes to weight loss, it's not the only thing that matters. Other factors such as hormonal imbalances, metabolic adaptations, the use of medications, and genetics may make weight loss harder for some people, even when they're on a strict diet. This concept also fails to emphasize the importance of sustainability and diet quality for weight loss.

# Checking the Facts

If you are suspicious about any nutrition information you have received or if you just want to know more, you could contact one of the following professionals, associations, or institutions:

- ☐ a dietitian
- ☐ your doctor
- ☐ your local health department
- ☐ your food science or Foods and Nutrition teacher
- ☐ a professional organization, such as Dietitians of Canada
- ☐ a government department, such as Health Canada
- ☐ the nutrition department of a nearby university or college

# Activity: Evaluating Advertisements.

## In this activity you will:

- identify examples of bias and exaggeration in advertisements.
- analyze how bias and exaggeration support an author's purpose.

**Exaggeration** is an overstatement or stretching the truth and **bias** is a judgment based on a personal point of view. In almost any advertisement, the purpose is to persuade. Exaggeration and bias are two methods that author can use to accomplish this purpose.

**After watching and reviewing the following advertisements (Posted in lesson#2.6), identify and discuss the exaggeration or bias seen in the advertisement.**

- 1) what examples of bias or exaggeration are in the advertisement?
- 2) what does the maker of this advertisement hope to achieve with the use of bias and exaggeration?
- 3) what does the advertiser do to make you want to buy the product?

# In Summary

- ✓ Critical thinking and communication skills can help you learn to distinguish legitimate sources and information from unsubstantiated claims
- ✓ Check sources, watch for bias, consider the evidence, and look for clinical trials involving human subjects when evaluating information about food claims
- ✓ Read labels carefully, make a grocery list, and check reliability of product sources when at the store or supermarket