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Food Fads

IT'S A FACT: As our scientific knowledge of human nutrition has increased, food fads and nutritional quackery have increased too. We have become more and more aware of the importance of food to health, of the value of knowing about the food we need, and about the composition of food we eat. Unfortunately, the quacks or charlatans have seen a chance to capitalize on our interest.

THE QUACK MAKES THE PITCH

There are several characteristics by which you can recognize a quack, charlatan, or promoter of dietary fads (he has many labels). He is almost always selling some special products — vitamin and mineral combinations, extracts or concentrates from sources not commonly used for food, or foods which he claims have been grown or prepared in such a way that they have superior and unique qualities. The cost of these to the consumer is exorbitant in relation to what it costs to produce them. In addition to wasting money, the use of such products can lead to malnutrition. Because the consumer is confident that everything he needs for good health is being supplied by the special product, he will ignore the need for eating a nutritionally adequate diet.

HE LECTURES

The promoter is often a so-called health food lecturer and writer and pretends to be a highly qualified scientist. Some of these lecturers put on a program that has all of the emotional appeal of a religious revival meeting. First he scares people about their health by claiming that the majority of persons are suffering from serious ailments which range from malnutrition to the most dreaded diseases known to man. Then he insists that by using his products and following his directions any and all the diseases will be cured. People who believe him often will delay seeing a doctor in time to prevent serious trouble.



The promoter also is extravagant and unscrupulous in making claims and promising benefits. When he

quotes from scientific reports he often takes statements away from their intended meaning and distorts them to support his claims. He advertises his products in a way that appeals to people's emotions and outrages all standards of professional ethics. Often he gives a money-back guarantee.

The charlatan may operate as a door-to-door salesman. Here he takes advantage of the privacy of the home to prescribe high-priced food supplements for any disease or condition which an ailing customer may mention or which the agent may suggest.

HE ATTACKS

Despite the abundance and high quality of our American food supply, the charlatans are waging a persistent campaign to undermine the confidence of the public in the nutritional value of our foods. They have succeeded in raising serious doubts in the minds of many Americans about the integrity and purity of the nation's food supplies. It is vital to the purpose of the quacks to cast doubt on the honesty and decency of food growers and processors and the quality of the food they produce. How else can the charlatans sell their own special foods and food supplements?

These nutritional quacks also attack the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, public health officials, the American Medical Association, and nutrition authorities. They often attempt to cripple the activities of our regulatory agencies that are responsible for food inspection and standards, by questioning their authority and discrediting their work.

HE GUARANTEES

The public is spending about 100 million dollars a year for fake reducing aids that are guaranteed to take off weight. These are chiefly pills of vitamin-mineral mixture, candies of sweetened skim milk powder, and fillers or bulk. Some are harmless except to the purse, but some contain dangerous drugs. A low-calorie diet plan is enclosed with most of the products. The advertising assures you that you can lose without dieting but that you will lose faster if you follow a low calorie diet!

Do you wonder how the fake promoters can afford to give a money-back guarantee? It is because hardly ever does anyone want to admit that he has failed in getting the promised results from the product he bought. So convincing is the advertising, that the unsuccessful person decides he may have been the one at fault. He is very likely to get his money back if he asks for it, but he does not want to risk the publicity of complaining.

HE PROFITS

Distorting facts into fads and taking unscrupulous advantage of people's interest and emotions about their health is big business today. Ten million Americans are pouring 500 million dollars a year into the pockets of the promoters of dietary fads. These ten million can be hurt if they believe that the promoter's cures are a short cut to health and can take the place of good food habits and competent medical care.

OLD WIVES' TALES

There is another kind of food misinformation that can be dangerous too: the myths and superstitions which

have been woven around food and handed down from one generation to another. Some of us who are horrified at the idea of following a food fad believe some of the old wives' tales about the good and bad qualities of different foods. For instance:

Milk is a food only for children, and grownups don't need it.

Milk eaten with fish or with sour fruits is harmful.

Meat is hard on the kidneys.

Fruit juices cause an acid condition in the body.

Apple cider vinegar makes the body burn fat instead of storing it.

THE WONDER OF IT

One reason for people's interest in fads and quackery and old wives' tales is the element of magic which is implied. Magic appeals to all of us; it softens the vividness of reality. To tell a person with a weight problem that she simply is eating too much—and must eat less to lose weight—is harsh reality. She would like to feel that she is a special case with a unique physical condition. In place of a low calorie diet she would prefer what seems like magic in the eat-as-usual-and-grow-thin fads.

Consider for a moment your own reactions when you go to a doctor with an ailment. Suppose he tells you that your trouble comes from excessive fatigue. He may explain that the body must have a reasonable amount of rest and relaxation in order to function normally and keep you well. He is likely to tell you also that if you persist in violating this well-established fact, little can be done to make you feel better. Do you

want to be told, "Now you know what is wrong; it is up to you to get more rest?" Or would you prefer being told that yours is an unusual case, medically interesting, and requiring a special combination of drugs or food supplements beyond your comprehension — in other words, a touch of magic?

But there is more than a touch of magic in good food and good health. It is a wondrous thing how everything we are was once in our food, that the relatively simple chemical units of food can be built so accurately into the complex human body, and that the kind and amount of the food we have at every age does so much to determine our health and vigor and size. Many of us do not recognize the marvel of Nature's packages of milk, meat, eggs, grains, and fruits and vegetables, because food seems like such an ordinary everyday thing and because choosing food is a voluntary activity.

