

## Trust Me, I'm a diet expert?

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When I woke up the other day I wasn't feeling too well. I had a headache and a sore throat, so I rang a mate of mine who's in the public service and has an arts degree and asked him what I should do. On the way to work I could hear a funny rattling noise in my car, so I rang a mate of mine who works in retail and asked him what could possibly be wrong. After training that evening, my left shoulder was tight and sore, so I rang my accountant to find out what could be causing the tightness and pain.

Do you see anything wrong with this picture? Clearly when it comes to treating a cold, fixing a car or diagnosing an injury I would chose my GP, a mechanic and physio to fix these problems. Why is it when it comes to getting nutrition advice, we seem to choose anyone except people who have training in nutrition?

There are a number of reasons why people gravitate towards these so-called experts.

This includes the attraction to their celebrity status (B-grade at best), people can related to their story because they have a similar journey ('I cut out sugar and now I feel great') or they have tried and failed time and time again most main stream, evidence based treatments and the results they wanted did not happen fast enough.

Now more than ever we have an over-abundance of 'experts' in nutrition who aren't actually experts. Many of these 'experts' claim their diet, lifestyle and eating plans are superior to others and that you can't trust the dietary guidelines because people become sicker when they eat these types of food. In reality, many of these people use their popularity, personality and persistence to spruik their products, including online eating plans, diet and cooking books.

So who do you need to look out for? Well, I'm not going to name names but the usual suspects include lawyers and journalists. The skill set these two occupations share is finding evidence to support a story or case, and these two groups seem to be pretty good at this. The next group includes personal trainers. Now, personal trainers have some nutrition training, but they don't have the qualifications to prescribe diets. Then there are the retired athletes, again using their personality and past physical prowess to sell meal replacement shakes. Then we have the others and this includes a range of people including chefs, apparent cancer survivors and medical specialists who specialise in anything but nutrition.

So what are the red flags you need to be aware of? You should first check to see if the diet includes the elimination of foods, food groups or nutrients. I should point out, some people need to avoid certain foods or food groups, in particular people who have coeliac disease. Unfortunately, due to the popularity of some anti-carb diets, going wheat free is now trendy, with people eliminating wheat from their diet thinking it is healthy for them. The next point is to see if the diet's main premise is weight loss, if it is, then any diet can achieve weight loss as long as you are eating less than your body requires. If the diet promises to cure disease and illness that is another red flag, so is the use of scare tactics like 'leaky gut,' 'sugar is as addictive as cocaine,' 'this food causes systemic inflammation' or 'causes chronic disease like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.' One final point to look out for, are they trying to sell you something? This can be dietary supplements, diet plans or meal replacement shakes.

So what to do? Well, it is up to the individual because we all have particular preferences, beliefs and views about food and nutrition. But at the same time you don't want to be ripped off or convinced you should avoid a particular food or nutrient when you really don't need to. No diet or eating plan is superior to any other, but what we do know is that particular intakes of foods and nutrients are beneficial to long term health and wellbeing. The key is striking the balance between what you like to eat, what you believe you should eat and enjoying what you eat. Just make sure the advice you are getting is from someone who has the right training and education to give out this advice.

*Written by Julian Everett. Julian is the co-owner of Body Basics and has over 25 years fitness, health and nutrition industry experience. He is a qualified personal trainer, strength and conditioning coach and dietitian. If you are interested in a nutrition consultation please contact reception.*