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Exaggerated claims for health programs may sound very convincing.



Click and Quack

Websites containing health scams are abundant.

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Internet frauds are ubiquitous. Many websites promise you a new life, making exaggerated claims in pseudo-scientific language that sounds very convincing, and too good to be true. They offer miracle programs and products to help you lose weight quickly, boost your immune system, combat joint pain, make your muscles bigger and stronger, give you more energy, cleanse your colon, slow down aging, relieve cold symptoms, and many more things. Some make it sound like the supplements they offer will “transform” your health.

Computer software is now available so that one can easily manipulate the shape and size of a person's body. We should be very skeptical of these before-and-after photos that result from following a certain diet. One should not buy anything that has an email address without a street address. These websites may be offshore and difficult to track down if you have to return faulty or ineffective items.

Google ads appear on thousands of websites. Any unsuspecting surfer of the Web can easily click on them. While many of the ads are for legitimate products, there are many which are deceptive offers making exaggerated claims for various products. Ads that promote a single product to cure multiple health problems should be a red flag for the consumer.

One of the recent scams was the push on açai berry weight-loss pills, which can supposedly boost metabolism, eliminate harmful toxins, give more energy and melt away pounds of body fat. In short, they promise a quick fix. Thousands of consumers were snookered by fake blogs, phony websites and bogus celebrity endorsements for such wonder products. Another “miracle” weight-loss product is Sensa, a cheese or fruit-flavored powder that is sprinkled on your food. Advertisers claim, without published evidence, that the scent suppresses one's appetite, so you end up eating less and losing weight.



Some sites pose as providing unbiased reviews to uncover scams and expose claims made for worthless pills, gadgets and schemes. These sites often end up promoting their own brand of supplements, on which they receive commissions. This is definitely a conflict

of interest. One can check out what other consumers have complained about by going to <http://www.complaintsboard.com> and <http://www.ripoffreport.com>. Another website to check out health frauds is <http://www.quackwatch.org>.

There are potential health consequences to the widespread fraudulent information available on the Internet. People may fail to seek appropriate medical care in a timely manner, and some may follow weight-loss diets that are dangerous and could cause serious harm to them. At the end of the day, consumers ultimately may be confused by all of the conflicting reports which describe what constitutes the pathway to good health.

It is always a wise policy to get a second opinion, and check out health information on the website of a reputable university or government agency, professional health organization or credible health center such as Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic.

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