

Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Being Skeptical of “Health Sellers” or Recognizing the Nuts Among the Berries!

A classic book on American health food fads, *The Nuts Among the Berries* (Ronald Deutsch, 1961) provides an amusing exposé of such past health nut individuals such as Kellogg (founder of Battle Creek, Michigan wellness spa and Kellogg cereals), Graham (a “Graham cracker a day keeps the doctor away”), Post and his toasties, and Fletcher (chew food 32 times because there are 32 teeth!) Today, “health” is promoted in magazines, newspapers, books, and newsletters and on television and radio. The “Internet inundates us with the latest ways to be healthier and live longer. Companies blast us with ubiquitous advertising for foods, beverages, drugs, vitamins, herbs, and other products that promise to keep us healthy” (Davis, R. J., *The Healthy Skeptic: Cutting through the HYPE about Your Health*, 2008:3).

Alkaline water: “Lose a pound a day! Relieve your indigestion! Look younger! Cure cancer! Scour the Internet and you’ll see a slew of websites promising to improve your health if only you follow their alkaline diet, drink alkaline water, or buy a water ionizer to get it from your tap” (*Alkaline products: healthy or all wet? Consumer Reports on Health, January 2013*). The claim: people have an imbalance of acid in their bodies (due to eating too much acid-producing foods). Therefore, one must raise alkaline levels to neutralize acid. Some researches speculate that modern diets are more acid-producing because they are “richer in saturated fat, simple sugars, sodium, and chloride, and lower in magnesium and potassium.” But, the body does not become acidic; the urine becomes acidic. This means the kidneys are effective in excreting the acid. “The alkaline diet consists of various foods, defined as alkaline or acidic, that allegedly will bring the pH of the blood to a level of slight alkalinity (7.35-7.45), a level which your body’s homeostatic mechanisms will achieve regardless of the alkalinity of your diet.” <http://www.skeptdic.com/alkalinediet.html>. The truth about “**oxygenated water**” is that “oxygen does not travel freely in the blood, and ionized forms of oxygen have very short life. Also, diatomic oxygen is toxic to living cells, and ionic forms of oxygen are even deadlier.” <http://www.pyroenergen.com/articles10/ionized-water.htm> People who have kidney disease should consult with their doctor about using alkaline products because a build up of phosphorus, potassium and sodium in alkaline products can be harmful. Bottom line: “Drinking more water is a good idea for better health, but be wary of products that can your money down the drain” (*Consumer Reports on Health, January 2013*).

“Tastants”: Can using the “Aroma Patch” (worn on hand/wrist/chest), or inhaling “SlimScents” (through the nose before meals), or sprinkling “Sensa” on foods help you lose weight? The Mayo Clinic suggests skipping the scents and focus on what’s proven to work—reducing the calories and increasing calories burned through physical activity. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sensa/AN02050>. Advertisements in the media suggest a person shake “Sensa.” on everything you eat and lose weight! Really! Here are a few questions to ask when viewing similar weight loss promotions: (1) What is in the product? (2) Who is promoting the product? (3) How many people were subjects in trial tests? (4) Have there been scientific peer reviews? (5) Are reviews published in scientific medical journals? (6) Are there health risks? As an example: “Sensa,” is promoted by its developer (Alan Hirsch, MD) with evidence based on a few company-sponsored (Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago); its studies are not published in peer-reviewed medical journals, and it uses a one-month free trial offer or a 6-month introductory rate of \$199 (with an enrollment catch of costing \$89.50 if people don’t send all of the product back within 30 days). “Sensa sprinkles are food flakes made from maltodextrin, tricalcium phosphate, silica, and flavors. You sprinkle them on food as you would salt or sugar, and they enhance scent while adding either a mildly salty or sweet taste.” “The lack of published scientific evidence on Sensa, along with a lack of diet and fitness guidelines to accompany the product, raise a red flag for some nutrition experts.” <http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/truth-about-sensa>. It takes the body about 10 to 20 minutes to realize that it is full. Generally a person takes just under 20 minutes to eat a dinner meal!

Did you know that Sylvester Graham’s principles of disease prevention, which he called “the Science of Human Life,” deemed just about everything considered immoral as being unhealthful, and that included sex ((p. 17 of Davis’ book)

An excellent web site that critiques health-related news stories is <http://www.healthnewsreview.org/reviews/>. A list of recommended (trust worthy sources) will be included in the May *Health Notes* with more examples of “nuts” as well as comments about half-truths about some of our favorites (e.g., dark chocolate and red wine).

[Some WWURA members have attended “end of life” seminars sponsored by WAHA (Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement) and recommend our members take the opportunity to attend. Check <http://www.whatcomalliance.org/> for information.] Phone number for WAHA: 788-6526.