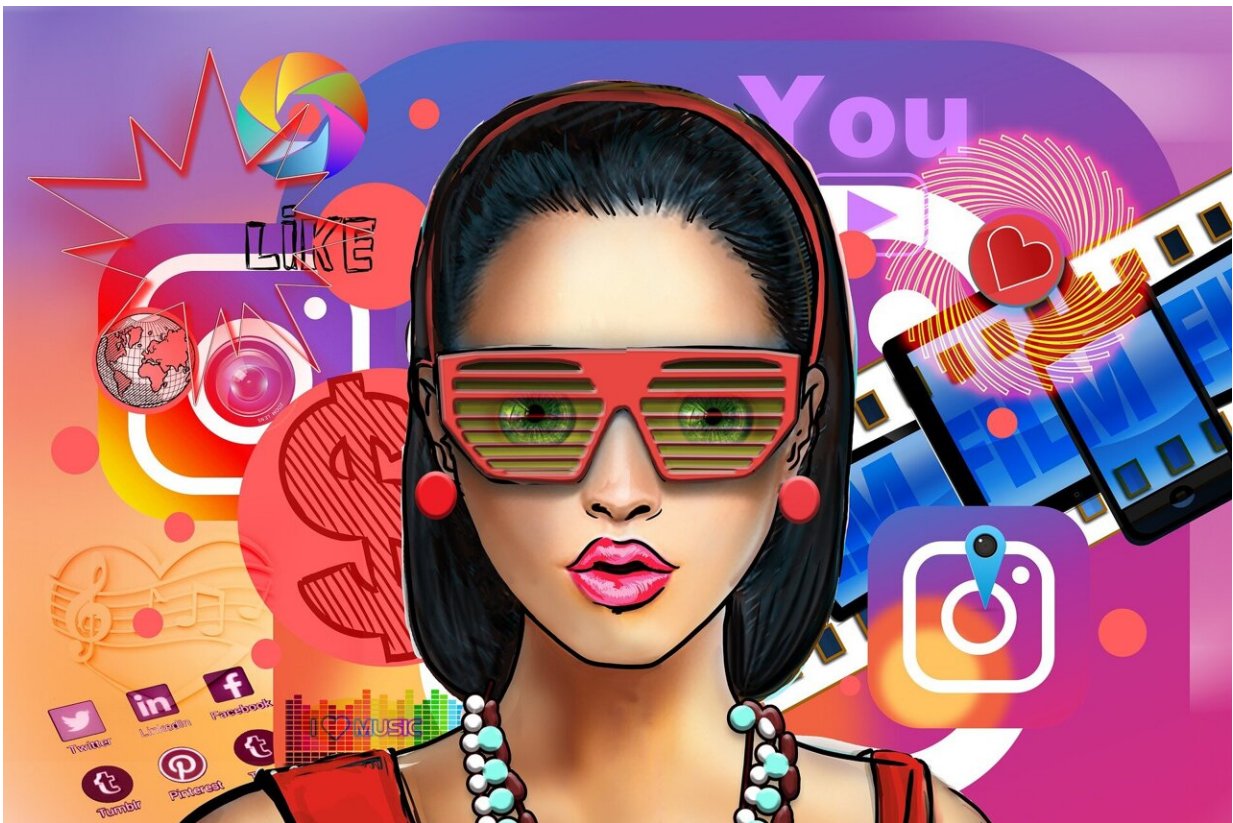


Stop taking health advice from social media influencers

December 21 2022, by Anagha Ramakrishnan



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Say you're scrolling through TikTok or Instagram and someone shares a video of a miracle cure. This supposed quick fix can reduce your weight, heal your gut, reduce bloating or completely cure your sickness. You

figure, this seems simple enough, why not try it and find out.

Weeks go by, and instead of consulting your doctor, you consult [social media](#) instead. However, chances are that instead of fixing your issue you might be making it worse.

"Health misinformation can lead to delayed patient care," [internal medicine](#) specialist Dr. Joyce Akwe told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "This misinformation can actually be life threatening to the patient. So, it's very important for the patient or their caretakers to be very informed about the [medical condition](#) they are dealing with."

According to a survey by GoodRx, more than 70% of Americans have been exposed to medical misinformation, of which 82% has come from social media. Additionally, the survey found that 44% of respondents weren't confident in deciphering whether the [medical information](#) they consumed was accurate or not.

Some [social media influencers](#) create viral trends under the guise of "wellness tips," but these posts repeatedly disseminate misinformation. In fact, a September investigation by NewsGuard found that 20% of videos that showed up from [search results](#) contained misinformation.

The biggest red flags to look out for are "promises of quick fixes and promises of miracles on treatments which do not have reputed evidence," Akwe said. "You hear they'll tell you something, and then you search on the internet and cannot find anything anywhere else. You can't find it in reputable journals or reputable sites. 'He says' it's not irrefutable evidence."

Anecdotal evidence shouldn't be taken for fact. If you have a concern about something you've seen on social media, consult your [health care provider](#) about your questions. Someone may share their symptoms of a

certain condition they have, and it may resonate with you. However, this does not necessarily mean you share the same condition. The opposite might actually be true.

"Separate conditions may manifest in a similar way, and the treatments are completely opposite or completely different," Akwe said. "At times the treatment for one of the conditions could be very dangerous for the opposite condition that appears to give a similar clinical picture.

"(For example,) if your blood sugars are very low, you will manifest symptoms in the same way as someone with very high blood sugars, but the treatments are completely opposite. For someone with high blood sugars, you're going to give insulin to bring the blood sugars down right away. If someone has very low blood sugars, and you go and give them insulin, you will kill them. If they're already unconscious because their blood sugars are low, instead of getting sugars you give them insulin, at that point you will kill them."

Different health-related trends make their rounds on social media platforms. Recently, posts about nutrition and particularly gut health have been gaining a lot of traction. One trend that circulated social media promoted eating papaya seeds to "kill parasites" in your gut. These claims are based on a 2007 study that found dried papaya seeds to be effective in treating only one type of parasite in children in Nigeria.

However, according to the Cleveland Clinic, this should not be applied to the general public. Further studies that are controlled, randomized and have larger sample sizes are needed to substantiate this claim.

Consuming papaya seeds may have harmful side effects, as they contain trace amounts of cyanide, according to Cleveland Clinic. Additionally, parasites shouldn't be a concern for most Americans.

"The average—or unaverage—American person doesn't have any

parasites," said William Schaffner, M.D., an infectious disease specialist and professor at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine told Health. "Doctors in the U.S. are not taking care of patients who have intestinal parasites unless those are people who recently came from the developing world."

Other videos include creators claiming things like consuming aloe vera juice, olive oil or supplements to boost their gut health. However, the data in these claims are lacking. Akwe cautions that, again, symptoms that might look like problems with the gut may actually be something else. If you have concerns about your gut, visit your doctor.

"You know, people may tell you what it takes to lose weight. It may be true. It may be questionable. It may work. It may not work, but you're really going blindly," Akwe said. "It's very important for you to verify certain things so that you don't get yourself in a situation where you're harming yourself thinking you're actually doing some good for yourself."

Not all information you see on social media is false, however. There are plenty of accredited doctors and medical professionals, like Akwe, who share helpful and accurate tips to improve health. Every time you see information about health on social media, check the accreditation of the person who made the video. Are they a doctor? Are they board certified? One way to check is by visiting DocInfo, a site created by the Federation of State Medical Boards, and type in their name.

How is the person delivering this information? Are they using superlatives and broad language to support their claim? Or are they citing research and verified sources? If someone claims that an alternative treatment is a quick fix to an issue, you should to double-check what they're saying.

Look up the information they are talking about in their post. Are they

referencing peer-reviewed studies with large, randomized sample sizes?
Can the information be found on other reputable sites such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Food and Drug Administration? If not, chances are the information you're consuming may be false.

2022 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Stop taking health advice from social media influencers (2022, December 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-health-advice-social-media.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.