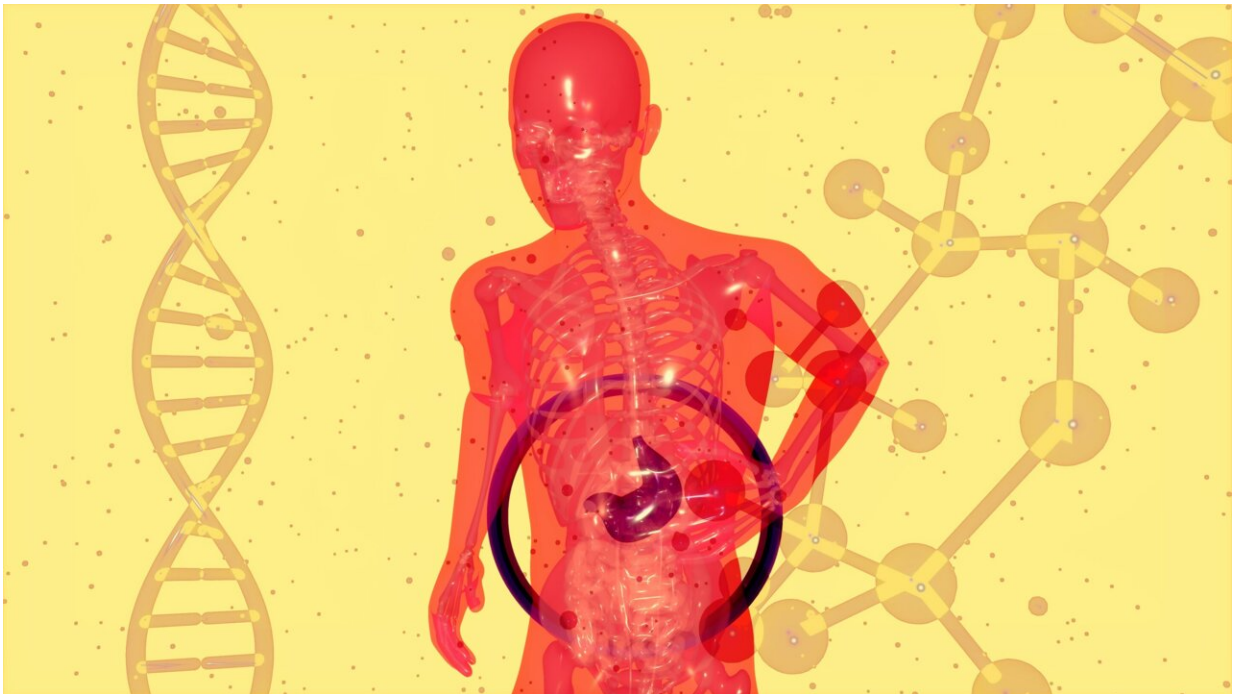# TikTok hosts the latest dance moves and bad information on liver disease

May 9 2023

Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Four in 10 posts about liver disease on TikTok contain misinformation, with most pushing inaccurate claims about fad diets, "detox" drinks and herbal remedies, according to a study being presented today at Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2023. Results suggest that liver disease patients who seek medical information on TikTok may need help separating good information from the bad.

"People should always consult their doctor first for guidance on their specific medical condition, but we also know that getting health information and tips from social media is extremely common these days," said Macklin Loveland, MD, the study's lead author and an internal medicine resident at University of Arizona College of Medicine. "When the average person sees a post about liver disease on social media, they may have no idea that the claims are entirely inaccurate."

For this study, Dr. Loveland identified 2,223 posts with the terms "cirrhosis" and "liver disease" on TikTok between Oct. 1 and Nov. 25, 2022. Comparing the posts against established practice guidelines for making patient care decisions from the current American College of Gastroenterology, American Gastroenterological Association and American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases, he found 883, nearly 40%, contained misinformation. The most common inaccurate posts had claims about herbal products reversing liver disease. Other posts falsely claimed that consuming various mushrooms, eating beef liver or doing a parasite cleanse would heal the liver.

Liver disease has been steadily increasing in the U.S. with 4.5 million adults diagnosed and more than 85 million people estimated to have liver disease but not know it. Treatment for liver disease varies depending on the diagnosis. Some liver issues can be addressed with lifestyle modifications, such as stopping alcohol use or losing weight, as part of a medical program that includes careful monitoring of liver function. Others may be treated with medication or surgery.

The inaccurate posts had far less engagement than accurate posts, with the misleading posts getting an average of 1,671 "likes" and 140 "shares" compared to an average 14,463 "likes" and 364 "shares" on accurate posts. Posts that were strictly informational contained far more misinformation than those with patients sharing personal experiences.

"Even though inaccurate posts were less popular, they still represent a high volume of misinformation on the platform, leaving people with liver disease susceptible to false claims," Dr. Loveland said. "Given the high mortality associated with liver disease, the impact of spreading inaccurate claims on such a popular social media platform could have serious clinical ramifications."

Loveland said his results make a case for better monitoring and regulation of the platform and for medical professionals to engage.

"It's clear that more needs to be done to flag misinformation on TikTok, including doctors becoming more heavily represented on the platform to combat misinformation with accurate, science-based information," Dr. Loveland said. "In general, TikTok and social media platforms are great sources to disseminate health information. However, we need to put more guardrails in place against false or misleading claims."

More information: Analysis of liver disease misinformation & accurate information within the social media platform, TikTok, abstract Tu1523. Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2023

Provided by Digestive Disease Week