

# What doctors tell their friends about fads

Miracle drinks, kale everything—some health trends really can help you, but which? Top doctors sort fact from fiction.

BY LIZ KRIEGER

## BE A LITTLE SKEPTICAL...

“There’s an unbelievable array of contradictory information out there, especially when it comes to nutrition. Opinions often masquerade as facts. The Web has become a sort of echo chamber where you can find 7,000 references to theories that have never had any solid science behind them. Suddenly people are convinced they have to give up gluten or fruit or beans—any number of things—when there’s no evidence that it would benefit them. Every single day I have to remind patients and friends who ask me about things they’ve heard or read to consider the source, even if it’s a doctor or health practitioner—because if that person is also trying to sell you something, like pricey supplements, that’s a conflict of interest. And while many experts have only the best intentions, you have to consider how

that aspect of their business can impact the information you’re given.” —David Katz, M.D., director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center at Griffin Hospital and founder of True Health Initiative

## ...BUT OPEN-MINDED

“After trying many things to get rid of her headaches to no avail, one of my friends asked if it made sense to cut out gluten. I told her it was worth a try. Lots of people seem to think they should go gluten-free when they don’t need to, but gluten does seem to be a factor in conditions other than celiac disease, including headaches, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and Hashimoto’s disease, an autoimmune condition involving the thyroid. After a few months, my friend found that the frequency of her headaches decreased while she was gluten-free and increased when she began eating it again. Another friend who had never really gotten her IBS under control went gluten-free and greatly improved. Talk to your doctor!” —Elizabeth Bradley, M.S., M.D., medical director for Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Functional Medicine

## DON’T DRINK THIS

“I’ve been asked so many times about ‘bulletproof coffee’—coffee loaded with butter and coconut oil. People claim that a cup in the morning keeps them from feeling tired and hungry, and I’m sure it does—but that’s largely because that one cup contains as many calories as a meal. It’s also packed with unhealthy saturated fats, which means you might actually gain weight drinking



KALE: YOELA/GETTY IMAGES. STANDING WOMEN: TARA MOORE/GETTY IMAGES.

it. Some argue that the medium-chain triglycerides in coconut oil won’t cause you to pack on pounds, but that’s not proven. So I encourage friends to eat a real breakfast instead—oatmeal, yogurt and berries, or whole-grain toast with nut butter will keep you satisfied until lunch.” —Lisa Young, Ph.D., adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University, practicing nutritionist in New York City, and author of The Portion Teller Plan

## OPINIONS OFTEN MASQUERADE AS FACTS. CONSIDER THE SOURCE.

## CAREFUL DOWN THERE!

“I’ve gotten my share of questions about jade eggs since they caused a stir online—the idea is to hold one of these eggs in your vagina to strengthen the pelvic floor. A close friend divulged over coffee one day that she was going to try it, hoping it would help with her incontinence. I told her not to do it. Jade is a porous material, which means it can harbor bacteria. Worst-case scenario, it could lead to serious illness like toxic shock syndrome. I encouraged my friend to find a physical therapist who specialized in the pelvic floor instead. A therapist can help you learn to do Kegels more effectively, and she can also use medical-grade devices to retrain your muscles, ease pelvic pain, and more. Medical-grade means safe. Please don’t put anything that’s not up there.” —Leena Nathan, M.D., assistant clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine and ob/gyn at UCLA Health

SITTING WOMAN: CSA PLASTOCK/GETTY IMAGES. BRUSH: CHRISTOPHER COPPOLA/STUDIO D.

## WATCH OUT FOR TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

“I spotted an old friend at work one day and immediately thought, *She’s orange!* Does she know? I wondered if she had been self-tanning, but as a doctor, I decided to ask if she had noticed a difference in her skin tone. Turned out she had, and she assumed it was something horrible, like pancreatic cancer. I asked if she had been eating a lot of carrots. She hadn’t, but she had been eating kale by the bowlful. I explained that kale, like carrots, contains a ton of beta-carotene, which can leave you looking orange. It took months of cutting back on kale, but over time her color started to return to normal. There’s a moral to the story: When it comes to food and exercise, steer clear of the extreme. Don’t do too much of anything and you’ll be fine.” —Dara Kass, M.D., clinical associate professor in the Ronald O. Perleman Department of Emergency Medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City

## HERE’S AN AMAZING INVENTION

“A workout buddy recently asked what I thought of the new period panties—superabsorbent lingerie designed to allow women to skip tampons and pads. She had experienced some light bladder leakage after the delivery of her second child, and she hated wearing a panty liner. I explained that while the idea of bleeding (or leaking) in your underwear can seem gross at first, these panties are usually made of multilayer fabric that actually wicks away moisture. They won’t increase your risk of infection, and depending on your flow, you can wear them all day long if you want. My friend decided to give them a try, and now she wears them for all or much of her period as well.” —Pamela Peeke, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at the University of Maryland, fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine, and author of Body for Life for Women

## THIS “TREND” GOES BACK CENTURIES

“Once, while we were walking through Chinatown, a friend asked me about the long loofah-like brushes hanging in many of the stores. Dry brushing is popular in Chinese culture, and it’s becoming more popular in American skin care too. Essentially, you rub a stiff-bristled brush over your skin in a circular motion in the direction of your heart, which increases circulation. I love that it causes skin to glow and decreases the appearance of cellulite, but that’s temporary, and I hesitate to suggest it to patients with sensitive skin. Still, the benefits are real, and it’s easy to do at home, inexpensively—if you can find the time for it every day. That’s the tricky part!” —Rachel Nazarian, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City

