Dieting is big business. In this country alone people spent approximately 43 billion dollars on weight-loss products in 2004. Today mass media is filled with information about nutrition, fitness and health. Much of the information is contradictory and sometimes down right false. People may be confused about their nutritional needs, can end up wasting their hard earned money and may even do harm to their health.

During March of each year National Nutrition® Month is observed. The American Dietetic Association (ADA) says that the most effective long-term way to achieve a healthful lifestyle is to be 100% Fad Free, which is the primary message of the 2007 National Nutrition Month® campaign. The ADA defines “food fads” as “unreasonable or exaggerated beliefs that eating or (not eating) specific foods, nutrient supplements or combinations of certain foods may cure disease, convey special health benefits or offer quick weight loss.”

How can the consumer make informed decisions and healthy choices? The following tips will help you determine the reliability of a new product, diet or nutrition recommendation:

- If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. No one food, diet or product can provide a “quick fix” to a weight or health problem.
- Avoid products that promise a guaranteed cure or promote miraculous results.
- Beware of products or books that label certain foods as “good” or “bad”.
- Question the reliability of an author that in addition to selling a book is also selling a product, like a supplement or piece of equipment.
- If a diet requires you to avoid foods or an entire group of foods, then look further. Years of science tell us that diets that require deleting an entire group of foods to be effective are unbalanced and you should be suspicious.

To make your National Nutrition Month 100% Fad Free the American Dietetic Association and other reputable nutrition professionals offer some practical ideas:

- Look at the “big” picture when choosing foods. All foods can fit into a healthy diet when consumed in moderation.
- Learn how to spot a food fad. Unreasonable or exaggerated claims should send up a red flag.
- Find your balance between food and physical activity.
- Misinformation can not only impact your wallet but have harmful effects on your health. Rely on qualified professionals for your nutrition questions.

Dr. Linda Bobroff, RD, LD/N, professor, University of Florida-IFAS Cooperative Extension, states “it is critical for consumers to be aware of who is qualified to practice nutrition or dietetics. In Florida, there are three credentials that allow people to legally practice as a nutrition or dietetics professional: Registered Dietitian (RD), Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist (LD/N) and Licensed Nutrition Counselor (LNC).” For the publication, Registration and Licensure of Nutrition Professionals in Florida, contact our office at the end of the article.

Other publications of interest might include, Identifying Accurate Internet Resources for Nutrition, Food Safety and Health Demonstrations (primarily for youth and their parents), Healthy Living for Elders: Reliable Web Sites, Healthy Living: Reliable Nutrition and Health Resources and Food and Fitness: Myths and Truths. In addition the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension Agent at your local Extension office may have accurate and reliable written food, nutrition and health information available.

Sources: http://www.eatright.org
http://www.cfsan.fda.gov
http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu