

Nutrition Accuracy in Popular Magazines



January
2004
to
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Nutrition Accuracy in Popular Magazines January 2004 – December 2005

Written for the American Council on Science and Health
by Kathleen Meister, M.S.

Project Coordinator:
Ruth Kava, Ph.D., R.D.

Magazine articles evaluated by:
Irene Berman-Levine, Ph.D., R.D.
F.J. Francis, Ph.D.
Ruth Kava, Ph.D., R.D.
Manfred Kroger, Ph.D.

Statistical analysis by Heidi Berman, B.A.

Articles selected and compiled by Mara Burney, B.A.

Judges' evaluations and survey results compiled by Jaclyn Eisenberg, B.A.

Art Director:
Jennifer Lee

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AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH
1995 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10023-5860
Phone: (212) 362-7044 • Fax: (212) 362-4919
URLs: <http://acsh.org> • <http://HealthFactsAndFears.com>
E-mail: acsh@acsh.org

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THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE WISHES TO THANK ALL THE REVIEWERS WHO EVALUATED THE MAGAZINE ARTICLES USED AS THE BASIS OF THE RANKINGS IN THIS SURVEY:

Irene Berman-Levine, Ph.D., R.D., is a nutrition consultant in Harrisburg, PA and Clinical Assistant Professor in Nutrition at the University of Pennsylvania.

F.J. Francis, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Food Science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Ruth Kava, Ph.D., R.D., is Director of Nutrition at the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH).

Manfred Kroger, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Food Science and Professor Emeritus of Science, Technology and Society at the Pennsylvania State University.

Heidi Berman, B.A., is a graduate student at the University of Washington.

Kathleen Meister, M.S., is a freelance medical writer and former Research Associate at ACSH.

Mara Burney, B.A., is a former ACSH Research Intern.

Jaclyn Eisenberg, B.A., is an ACSH Research Intern.

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Introduction

Nutrition articles in magazines can be an asset or a threat to the public's health. But such articles often sell magazines. Thus it's no surprise that they publish an abundance of information about nutrition. According to the Magazine Publishers of America, 6.7% of all editorial (nonadvertising) pages in American consumer magazines were devoted to food and nutrition in 2005; that's more than eleven thousand pages in that year alone!¹ People read and trust what's written on those pages. National surveys conducted in 2000 and 2002 by the American Dietetic Association² and a 2006 Tufts University study of people over the age of 50³ all indicated that between 50 and 60% of the survey respondents turn to magazines for information about nutrition. And readers aren't just skimming magazine articles; many of them are changing their eating habits on the basis of what they read. In a 2006 survey of U.S. consumers conducted by the International Food Information Council, 42% of the respondents reported that they had made diet-related changes in the previous six months on the basis of information they had obtained from health and fitness magazines.⁴

With such a large proportion of the population making changes in their eating habits on the basis of information obtained from magazines, it is crucial to know just how accurate that information is. To evaluate the quality of nutrition information presented in popular magazines, the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) has been tracking nutrition reporting in these publications for more than 20 years. Over that period as a whole, ACSH has found that the quality of the reporting has improved, reflecting most magazines' growing commitment to educating their readers. In the shorter term, however, the current survey, which included articles published in 2004 and 2005, did not show any improvement over the immediate previous survey, which covered articles published between 2000 and 2002. In fact, the quality of nutrition

coverage in popular magazines may have deteriorated slightly since the beginning of the current decade.

In this, the tenth *Nutrition Accuracy in Popular Magazines* survey, ACSH found that more than three quarters (16 of 21) of the magazines included in the survey were EXCELLENT or GOOD sources of nutrition information; less than one quarter scored in the FAIR or POOR range. Overall, the highest scoring magazines were those in the "Consumer" category, while the "Health" category received the lowest scores; however, there were substantial differences among the scores of magazines within each category. As was also true in ACSH's most recent previous survey, which included articles published in 2000 through 2002, health magazines aimed at male readers were especially likely to score in the FAIR or POOR range. Only one magazine earned a rating of EXCELLENT. Thus, there is still room for improvement in nutrition coverage, even in some of America's most respected magazines.

The results of the current survey indicate the following:

1. Most of today's consumer magazines are providing their readers with generally sound information about nutrition, but some errors and misconceptions can nevertheless be found in their articles.
2. The quality of reporting on nutrition in popular magazines did not improve between 2000–2002 and 2004–2005 and may even have deteriorated over that time period.
3. Health and fitness magazines aimed at male readers continue to have the poorest nutrition coverage.
4. Because the nutrition coverage in popular magazines may not always be reliable, readers should be cautious about making changes in their eating habits exclusively on the basis of information they have obtained from magazine articles.

1. Magazine Publishers of America. The Magazine Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide 2006/07. Available online at <http://www.magazine.org/content/Files/MPAHandbook06.pdf>.
2. American Dietetic Association, Nutrition and You: Trends 2002, Final report of findings, October 2002.
3. McKay DL, Houser RF, Blumberg JB, Goldberg JP. Nutrition

information sources vary with education level in a population of older adults. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 2006;106:1108-1111.
4. IFIC Foundation, Food & Health Survey. Consumer Attitudes toward Food, Nutrition & Health, 2006. Available online at <http://www.ific.org/research/upload/2006foodandhealthsurvey.pdf>

The Survey: Methodology and Rating Criteria

For this survey, as for the previous surveys in this series, ACSH identified top-circulating U.S. magazines that regularly publish articles on nutrition topics. We made an effort to include magazines with different target audiences in order to sample articles aimed at a variety of readers. All 20 of the magazines included in ACSH's most recent previous survey were evaluated this time as well. In addition, one magazine, *Child*, was evaluated for the first time.

For each magazine, we identified all nutrition articles of at least one-half page in length published between January 2004 and December 2005, inclusive. If more than 10 appropriate articles were available, we selected 10 of the articles at random, using a random number generator (however, due to an error only 9 articles from *Shape* magazine were evaluated). To minimize judging bias, we electronically scanned the articles and reformatted them to eliminate identifying features such as magazine titles and author names. This method of masking cannot be counted upon to obscure the origins of all articles, however. For example, the judges might have surmised that articles about children's nutrition most likely came from *Parents* or *Child*, that articles about nutrition for runners most likely came from *Runner's World*, and that articles about nutrition for bodybuilders most likely came from *Muscle and Fitness*. The unique product ratings published by *Consumer Reports* would probably also be identifiable.

Four experts in nutrition and food science independently judged the quality of each of the 210 magazine articles in the following three areas:

- Factual accuracy (Was the information in the article scientifically sound? Did the article document the sources of the information?)
- Presentation (Was the article objective? Was the headline consistent with the content? Were the conclusions logical?)
- Recommendations (Did the article make prac-

tical recommendations? Were the recommendations supported by information in the article? Were they based on accepted nutritional practices?)

For each of eight separate points, the judges were asked to indicate whether they "strongly agreed," "somewhat agreed," were "neutral," "somewhat disagreed," or "strongly disagreed" with the statement. These responses corresponded to numeric values ranging from a high score of five to a low of one. A composite score was determined for each article based on the judges' evaluations, and the composite scores for each magazine were determined by averaging the scores for all articles in that magazine. The results were then tabulated to determine each magazine's ranking. The highest possible score was 100%. Categories were assigned as follows: EXCELLENT (100–90%), GOOD (89–80%), FAIR (79–70%), POOR (below 70%).

The overall results of the survey were not encouraging. As judge Dr. Irene Berman-Levine put it, in comments written before the results had been tabulated, "In reviewing articles this year I do not see the continual improvement that I have witnessed in previous years with the exception of improvement (in some articles) in trying to reference the source of their information. This is disappointing."

The analysis of the results is consistent with Dr. Berman-Levine's impression. In ACSH's most recent previous survey, which covered articles published between 2000 and 2002, the ratings were higher than those in earlier surveys, reflecting a continuing long-term trend toward improvement. The current survey, however, did not show any further increase in the quality of nutrition reporting; in fact, the proportion of magazines scoring at least 80% (the lower limit of the GOOD range) was lower in the current survey than in the previous one (current survey: 15 of 21, or 71%; 2000–2002: 16 of 20, or 80%). There was some good news in the current survey: one magazine scored in the EXCELLENT range this time, while none did in 2000–2002; and only one magazine scored in the POOR range this time,

compared to two in 2000–2002. Overall, though, the quality of nutrition reporting in popular magazines seems to have leveled off and may be declining.

Table 1 presents the results of the current survey, with the magazines classified into four groups, based on their focus and readership: Consumer, Women, Home, and Health. The overall score of the magazines in the Consumer group was statistically significantly higher than that for the Health group; the finding of “statistical significance” indicates that the difference between these two particular groups is unlikely to be due to chance alone. Other differences between groups were not statistically significant. Among magazines in the Health group, the lowest scores were earned by magazines aimed at male readers; this pattern has also been seen in previous ACSH surveys.

In addition to the scores from the current survey, Table 1 also shows scores

that each magazine earned in the previous ACSH survey, which appeared in 2004 and covered articles published in 2000 to 2002. Because the rating criteria and methodology of the current survey are the same as those used in the previous survey, the new results can be directly compared with the older ones.

Table 1. Ranking of Evaluated Magazines

Magazine (listed by target audience group)	Circulation (in millions)*	Previous (2000–2002) Survey Score (percent)	Current (2004–2005) Survey Score (percent)	Group Score (percent)
Consumer				84%†
Consumer Reports	7.4	86	90	
Child	0.8	NA	86‡	
Parents	2.0	89	86	
Reader's Digest	10.1	83	76	
Women				83%
Glamour	2.4	81	87	
Ladies' Home Journal	4.1	89	87	
Woman's Day	4.0	82	84	
Redbook	2.4	83	83	
Self	1.4	80	83	
Cosmopolitan	3.0	78	75	
Home				83%
Cooking Light	1.7	88	84	
Good Housekeeping	4.6	86	83	
Better Homes and Gardens	7.6	87	81	
Health				79%
Shape	1.7	80	87	
Fitness	1.5	81	84	
Health	1.4	87	82	
Runner's World	0.6	85	82	
Prevention	3.3	82	80	
Men's Health	1.8	71	76	
Muscle and Fitness	0.4	68	72	
Men's Fitness	0.7	68	67	

NA, not applicable – this magazine was not included in the 2000–2002 survey.

* Most of the circulation information in this table was obtained from the *Circulation Trends & Magazine Handbook* on the Magazine Publishers of America Web site, at http://www.magazine.org/circulation/circulation_trends_and_magazine_handbook/16117.cfm, and represents average total paid circulation for 2005. Exceptions are as follows: The value for *Consumer Reports* is for fiscal year 2006 and is derived from the company's annual report, available at <http://www.consumerreports.org/annualreport/annualreport2006.pdf>. The values for *Child*, *Muscle and Fitness*, and *Men's Fitness* were obtained from the Web sites of their parent companies (Meredith Corporation for *Child*, American Media, Inc., for the other two). The value for *Runner's World* is a “rate base” value, obtained from the magazine's Web site.

† Significantly better than the Health category.

‡ When scores were tied (to the nearest percentage point), magazines were listed alphabetically.

Table 2 shows the overall ranking of the 21 magazines and their rankings in the three subcategories of Accuracy, Presentation, and Recommendations. It also indicates when there were statistically significant differences between the scores of specific magazines. In general, the statistical analysis indicates that true differences exist between magazines near the top of the rankings and those at the very bottom. Thus, the nutri-

tion coverage of the magazines near the bottom of the rankings should be viewed as the least reliable, but small differences in scores among better-scoring magazines may not be meaningful. Table 3 summarizes the judges' findings about each individual magazine. The next sections of this report describe those findings in greater detail.

Table 2. Ranking of Magazines by Overall Mean Ratings and Subcategory Ratings^a

Rank	Overall	Accuracy	Presentation	Recommendations
1	Consumer Reports ^{b,c}	Consumer Reports ^d	Consumer Reports ^{e,f}	Consumer Reports ^{g,h}
2	Shape ^b	Glamour ^d	Ladies' Home Journal ^e	Shape ^{g,h}
3	Ladies' Home Journal ^b	Ladies' Home Journal ^d	Parents ^e	Child ^g
4	Glamour ^b	Fitness	Shape ^e	Glamour ^g
5	Parents ^b	Child	Glamour ^e	Parents ^g
6	Child ^b	Redbook	Child ^e	Ladies' Home Journal ^g
7	Fitness ^b	Shape	Woman's Day	Fitness ^g
8	Woman's Day ^b	Woman's Day	Cooking Light	Good Housekeeping ^g
9	Cooking Light ^b	Parents	Good Housekeeping	Runner's World ^g
10	Redbook ^b	Cooking Light	Self	Cooking Light ^g
11	Self ^b	Self	Redbook	Woman's Day ^g
12	Good Housekeeping ^b	Better Homes and Gardens	Health	Redbook ^g
13	Health	Health	Fitness	Self ^g
14	Runner's World	Good Housekeeping	Runner's World	Health ^g
15	Better Homes and Gardens	Runner's World	Better Homes and Gardens	Prevention
16	Prevention	Prevention	Prevention	Better Homes and Gardens
17	Reader's Digest	Cosmopolitan	Cosmopolitan	Men's Health
18	Men's Health	Men's Health	Reader's Digest	Reader's Digest
19	Cosmopolitan	Reader's Digest	Muscle and Fitness	Muscle and Fitness
20	Muscle and Fitness	Muscle and Fitness	Men's Health	Cosmopolitan
21	Men's Fitness	Men's Fitness	Men's Fitness	Men's Fitness

a For the purposes of this table, the data were carried out to as many decimal places as necessary to break ties.

b Significantly better than *Men's Fitness*.

c Significantly better than *Muscle and Fitness*.

d Significantly better than *Men's Fitness* and

Muscle and Fitness.

e Significantly better than *Men's Fitness*.

f Significantly better than *Men's Health*.

g Significantly better than *Men's Fitness*.

h Significantly better than *Cosmopolitan* and *Muscle and Fitness*.

Table 3. General Comments

Magazine	General Comments
Consumer Reports	The best in all respects. Did a great job with both long and short articles. Ranked #1 in all three subcategories: Accuracy, Presentation, and Recommendations.
Glamour	Most articles were very good, although some could have used more interpretation or perspective to help readers understand scientific findings. Ranked #2 in Accuracy.
Ladies' Home Journal	Has maintained recent improvements. Published an outstanding food safety article; a few flaws in other articles. Ranked #2 in Presentation.
Shape	Superb long articles. Compilations of shorter pieces had a few factual errors and omissions. Ranked #2 in Recommendations.
Child	Excellent advice in full-length articles. Compilations of shorter articles had some errors.
Parents	Most articles earned high scores, but this magazine's overall score suffered because of one very inaccurate and misleading article about food additives.
Cooking Light	Some articles offered excellent advice. Others, however, omitted information that would have been useful to readers.
Fitness	Articles varied in quality. The judges were impressed with some articles, especially those aimed at parents, but other articles included misconceptions.
Woman's Day	Some very good articles. Others, however, lacked documentation of sources or included scientifically unsound information.
Good Housekeeping	Would have scored much higher if its writers had documented their sources of information.
Redbook	Some articles scored high, but others lost points for overextrapolation from preliminary, unreplicated scientific studies or for the presence of factual errors.
Self	Several good weight-control articles. Other articles contained exaggerated claims or omitted crucial information.
Health	Some articles were good, but others overextrapolated from preliminary or disputed scientific evidence.
Runner's World	Did a much better job with long articles than with compilations of short pieces.
Better Homes and Gardens	Lost points primarily because of factual errors in several articles.
Prevention	Had some problems with poor documentation of sources and overinterpretation of preliminary data, but did a better job than most of including crucial warnings in short items.
Men's Health	A clever, attention-grabbing writing style seemed to triumph over accuracy and documentation of sources in this magazine.
Reader's Digest	The judges noticed factual errors and instances of overgeneralization of scientific findings.
Cosmopolitan	Two articles scored high, but they were more than offset by other articles that contained scientific misconceptions and by an article that recommended an appallingly unsound weight-loss diet.
Muscle and Fitness	Some articles overextrapolated from preliminary scientific information, did not document sources adequately, and/or included factual errors.
Men's Fitness	Many articles had inaccurate, exaggerated, and/or undocumented statements about various aspects of nutrition.

Magazine Rated EXCELLENT (90% or higher)

Consumer Reports

(#1 in our survey; overall score 90%)

The highest-rated magazine in ACSH's survey and the only one to receive an EXCELLENT rating, is *Consumer Reports*. This magazine also earned the highest scores in each of the three rating subcategories: Accuracy, Presentation, and Recommendations. *Consumer Reports* has been at or near the top of the rankings in every ACSH survey in which it has been included, always scoring in the EXCELLENT range or in the top half of the GOOD range.

The August 2004 *Consumer Reports* article "Designer Eggs: The Best Way to Get Your Omega-3 Fatty Acids?" received top marks from ACSH's judges. Dr. Irene Berman-Levine, one of the judges, called this a "great article that critically evaluated claims." Another judge, Dr. Ruth Kava, complimented the article's "common-sense, rational approach" to assessing the value of designer eggs. The judges were also impressed with the June 2004 article "The Truth About Low-Carb Foods," an "excellent and exhaustive investigative report," in the words of judge Dr. Manfred Kroger.

When *Consumer Reports* devotes a full-length article to a topic, they investigate that topic very thoroughly. One example of this was the June 2005 article "Rating the Diets from Atkins to Zone," for which the magazine calculated the calorie counts and nutrient composition of a week's worth of menus from each of nine popular weight-loss diets, compared them to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and evaluated published research on each diet's effectiveness and dropout rates. The result was a very informative report that would be of great value to anyone who is trying to intelligently select a weight-loss diet plan.

Consumer Reports' analytical approach also serves readers well when it comes to shorter articles and simpler topics. For example, the brief

May 2005 article "We Have the Skinny on Cracker Nutrition" made good use of nutritional analyses of 15 popular brands of crackers to make the point that the calorie, fat, and sodium content of different types of crackers varies greatly. Indeed, *Consumer Reports* is unusual among the magazines in this survey in that its short articles are of the same quality as the longer ones.

Magazines Rated GOOD (80% to 89%)

Glamour

(tied for #2, overall score 87%)

Glamour magazine tied for second place in ACSH's current survey, with a GOOD score of 87%. In 2000–2002, this magazine received a score of 81%.

ACSH's judges gave high marks to the August 2005 article "What's Your Healthiest Weight?", which Dr. Manfred Kroger described as "a good analysis of what constitutes ideal weight." The judges were pleased with the very thorough discussion of the dangers of overweight that this article provided. Another article that scored high was March 2004's "Your Big Fat Questions About Fat Answered," which provided well-researched information on various aspects of both fat in foods and fat in the human body.

The judges were more critical of other *Glamour* articles, though. Reviewing the June 2005 article "Why You Love Sugar, and Is That So Bad," Dr. Ruth Kava noted that the article missed an opportunity to inform readers that more can be gained by choosing foods on the basis of their positive nutritional qualities rather than merely looking for those with the lowest sugar content. This article also included outdated, inaccurate information on the safety of saccharin. The July 2004 article "50 Ways to Lose Weight," which consisted of a collection of weight-loss tips from women who had dieted successfully, also received some criticism from the judges, primarily for its lack of interpretation and scientific perspective.

Ladies' Home Journal

(tied for #2, overall score 87%)

In the report on our last survey, we raved about the improvement in nutrition coverage in *Ladies' Home Journal*. This time, we're delighted to report that the improvement has been maintained. This magazine, which scored 89% last time, scored 87% this time, placing it in the GOOD range.

ACSH's judges were very impressed with the May 2004 article "The Fatal Flaw in Your Fresh Foods," which outlined the need to revamp and consolidate roles within the U.S. government to strengthen food safety procedures and reduce the risk of foodborne illness. According to Dr. Irene Berman-Levine, "Everyone, including every senator and representative, should read this article *before* they get hepatitis or other foodborne illnesses." The September 2004 article "What Even Young Women Need to Know About Bone Health," a thorough and accurate discussion of osteoporosis that emphasized the effects of diet and lifestyle on bone health in the years before menopause, also received high marks from ACSH's judges.

Other *Ladies' Home Journal* articles received more mixed reviews. For example, the judges praised the accuracy of the information in the June 2005 article "Bottoms Up for Better Health," which summarized recent research on the health effects of alcoholic beverages, but criticized it for presenting only the positive side of alcohol and for failing to specify how much of an alcoholic beverage constitutes "one drink." And the judges were disappointed with the December 2004 article "Diet Soda Danger," which linked the caffeine, carbonation, and artificial sweeteners in diet sodas with bladder irritation, when in fact there is solid evidence of such a relationship only for caffeine.

Shape

(tied for #2, overall score 87%)

Shape magazine tied for second place in ACSH's new survey, with a GOOD score of 87%. In the 2000–2002 survey, it had scored considerably lower, at fifteenth place and 81%.

The nutrition articles in *Shape* are of two different kinds: long articles that examine a particular subject in depth and compilations of short news items. The long articles are usually well researched and well written. The compilations are of less consistent quality. As ACSH has noted in previous surveys, some nutrition topics simply cannot be covered adequately in a short news item, and the omission of crucial facts can leave readers misinformed. This problem is not unique to *Shape*; it is simply more visible in this magazine than in some others because so much of *Shape's* nutrition coverage is in the form of compilations.

Among the longer articles, the April 2004 article "Six Reasons You Overeat," which discussed research on eating cues and provided practical advice on how to avoid the pitfalls they create, particularly impressed the judges. Dr. F.J. Francis gave this article high marks and noted that it was both unusual and very interesting. Another impressive long article was the October 2004 "Size Matters!" — an informative discussion of portion size that included a day's worth of recipes that carefully specified the appropriate amounts to serve.

The judges were more critical of *Shape's* compilation articles, usually because one or two of the items within them included inaccurate information. For example, a July 2004 compilation (in which the first item was "Are You a Flexitarian?") was downrated because an item on omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids gave the mistaken impression that all fatty acids of both types are nutritionally essential. Similarly, a May 2004 compilation (first item: "Fish Florentine") was criticized by the judges because one of the items incorrectly implied that liquid sugar is nutritionally superior to regular sugar.

Child

(tied for #5; overall score 86%)

Child magazine, a newcomer to ACSH's survey, earned a GOOD score of 86%.

One of the best articles in *Child* was the September 2004 article "Eating for 2: A Three-Trimester Menu," which provided sound and sensible advice on many aspects of nutrition during pregnancy, including potentially confusing topics such as the potential benefits and risks of consuming various types of fish. Good guidance was also offered by the October 2004 article "Starting Solids," which Dr. Ruth Kava described as "well-organized and clearly written, with common-sense advice."

As was the case in several other magazines, several *Child* articles that consisted of compilations of short items did not score as high as the longer feature articles did. For example, a September 2004 compilation (first item: "Loving the Lunchbox") lost points with the judges because an item on the reformulation of food products to remove or reduce *trans* fats did not make it clear that eliminating *trans* does not necessarily make a food healthful. Another compilation, published in February 2004 (first item: "Red Hot Lunch") lost points for stating, incorrectly, that strawberries are a good source of calcium. Another issue with the compilation articles was their frequent recommendation of specific brand-name items. Although it may be helpful to readers to draw their attention to new or interesting products, there is a risk that recommending a specific brand-name product in a nutrition article may imply that the product is nutritionally superior to other brands; often, this implication is not justified.

Parents

(tied for #5; overall score 86%)

Parents consistently ranked very high in ACSH's past surveys, usually earning a score of around 90% and placing among the top four magazines. This time, though, *Parents* ranked a bit lower, with a GOOD score of 86%, tying it for fifth place in ACSH's survey.

The drop in *Parents*' score was attributable primarily to a startlingly and uncharacteristically poor May 2005 article about food additives, titled "What's in Your Food?" This article received very low scores from ACSH's judges both because it contained factual errors and because it perpetuated the misconception that "natural" automatically means "healthful."

The other articles in *Parents* fared much better with the judges. Dr. Manfred Kroger was especially impressed with the April 2005 article "Weighing In," which discussed body image and dieting issues as they pertain to preteens. He described the article as a "good, serious treatment of a common problem." The judges also liked the sound advice presented in the November 2004 article "Better Breakfasts," although Dr. Irene Berman-Levine pointed out that the hypothesis that young children who don't eat breakfast every day are more likely to have tooth decay has not been proven. The December 2005 article "10 Amazing Foods for Kids" also scored high, although Dr. Ruth Kava noted that the wording of the discussion of whole-wheat bread might have mistakenly led parents to believe that this type of bread is fortified.

Cooking Light

(tied for #7, 84%)

Cooking Light earned a GOOD score of 84% in ACSH's survey, tying it for seventh place; in the 2000–2002 survey, *Cooking Light* scored 88%.

One of the best *Cooking Light* articles, according to ACSH's judges, was the July 2004 article "What to Eat After a Workout," which not only provided good nutrition advice from a registered dietitian but also gave practical quick meal suggestions for people who are trying to squeeze exercise and eating into a single lunch hour. The April 2004 article "The Good Egg" also scored high, thanks to its balanced, non-alarmist discussion of this often-controversial food. "At last — common sense on egg consumption!" commented Dr. Ruth Kava.

Other *Cooking Light* articles did not fare so well. A July 2004 compilation article (first item: "Try Sunshine and Bran for Colon Health") lost points

for not making clear that much of the research described was preliminary. A December 2005 compilation (first item: “Allspice Berry”) contained an inaccurate value for the sodium content of oatmeal that affected the article’s conclusions about the relative nutritional merits of oatmeal vs. cream-of-wheat cereal. And the December 2005 article “Healthful Seasonal Foods” encouraged the consumption of chocolate without mentioning its calorie content.

Fitness

(tied for #7, 84%)

Fitness magazine received a GOOD score of 84%, tying it for seventh place in ACSH’s survey. This magazine earned a score of 81% in the 2000–2002 survey.

The August 2004 article “Diet Slipups Every Mom Makes” was one of *Fitness*’s best. It offered good, common-sense advice about how to counter some of the poor eating habits that busy mothers can easily slip into, such as eating off a child’s plate, eating too quickly, and skipping meals. Another article that earned a relatively high score was the February 2005 Healthy Pregnancy article “Eat This Before You Conceive.” The judges noted, however, that the article could have been improved by adding a discussion of the desirability of getting to and maintaining a healthy body weight.

Less successful articles in *Fitness* included the December 2004 article “The Get Gorgeous Diet,” which advised readers to “load up on vitamin A” — a bad idea since excessive doses of this vitamin can be toxic — and the May 2005 article “The Best Healthy-Eating Tips from Around the World,” which exaggerated the benefits of diet, according to the judges. As Dr. Irene Berman-Levine noted with regard to the latter article, it shouldn’t be assumed that differences in dietary patterns between countries are necessarily responsible for differences in disease rates. Differences in lifestyle, activity levels, and other factors could also be important. Unfortunately, this perspective was not included in the *Fitness* article.

Woman’s Day

(tied for #7, 84%)

Woman’s Day earned a GOOD score of 84% in ACSH’s survey, tying it for seventh place. In the 2000–2002 survey, this magazine scored 82%.

ACSH’s judges gave good marks to the April 2005 article “Should You Take Diet Pills?” — a “good, professional discussion” of this subject, in the words of Dr. Manfred Kroger. The October 2004 article “Snacks That Satisfy” also scored well and was praised for its “practical nutrition suggestions” by Dr. Ruth Kava.

Several other articles in *Woman’s Day* lost points, however, for inadequate documentation of information sources or for including information that does not have a sound scientific basis. For example, although some of the diet and lifestyle suggestions in the September 2004 article “50 Ways to Live to 100” were based on sound science, others, such as drinking red wine because it extends the life of yeast cells, were not. (Yeasts are not people.) And while the April 2004 article “Herbal Remedies: How to Use Them Safely?” correctly pointed out that herbs can have risks as well as benefits, it did not distinguish between well-documented facts and anecdotal reports, and the sources of much of the information in the article were unclear.

Good Housekeeping

(tied for #10; overall score 83%)

Good Housekeeping’s coverage of nutrition seems to be slipping a bit. In the current ACSH survey, it earned a GOOD score of 83%, as compared to 86% in the previous survey, and 90% in the one before that.

Good Housekeeping’s most important problem was poor documentation of sources. In some instances, the sources of information were indicated so vaguely that a reader would not have been able to track them down; in other cases, the magazine did not provide any indication at all of where its information came from. An example was the October 2005 article “Easy Ways to Eat

Right,” which was full of excellent advice and would probably have received a perfect score, except for one huge flaw — a complete lack of documentation.

Length may also be an issue for *Good Housekeeping*. Several brief articles or items within compilation articles seemed to be too short to cover their topics adequately. For example, in a January 2005 compilation (first item: “Cocoa: The New Health Drink”) one item informed readers who hate swallowing pills that a new brand of calcium supplement with tablets 30% smaller than those of competitors had just come on the market. Unfortunately, though, the article did not point out that chewable calcium supplements, which are even less intimidating for people who have trouble swallowing pills, are also available. It would have taken only one more sentence to provide this information. Even more seriously, a short September 2004 article titled “Are You Getting Enough Potassium?” told readers to check with their doctors before taking potassium supplements, but did not say that hyperkalemia from supplements can be dangerous and can cause cardiac arrhythmias and other serious problems. The article also stated that most women are not getting enough potassium “according to the latest guidelines” but did not say what guidelines it was referring to; it would have taken only a few more words to explain this important point.

On the other hand, ACSH’s judges had high praise for a July 2004 *Good Housekeeping* compilation (first item: “Can This Diet Prevent Cancer?”), in which one item critically evaluated a controversial diet book. Dr. Manfred Kroger described this article as “very courageous” and said, “This is what magazines should do: point out the useless in popular culture.” Another article that scored high was the August 2005 article “Good Food!”, which provided a variety of suggestions for good nutrition for children during the school year, including advice on difficult situations such as 10:30 a.m. lunch periods.

Redbook

(tied for #10; overall score 83%)

Redbook earned a GOOD score of 83% in ACSH’s survey, tying it for tenth place. This magazine also received a score of 83% in ACSH’s 2000–2002 survey.

ACSH’s judges gave relatively high marks to the April 2004 *Redbook* article “The Smartest Fast Food Picks for Your Kids,” a rational, non-hysterical look at fast foods that was marred only by an exaggerated statement about the presence of vitamin C in French fries. Another sensible article for parents, the April 2005 article “How Experts Get Their Kids to Eat Healthy,” also scored well. The article, which described techniques that several physicians, dietitians, and other knowledgeable professionals use to improve their own children’s diets, offered well-thought-out ideas such as serving a snack of vegetables with dip before dinner, when children tend to be very hungry, and allowing children who don’t like traditional breakfast foods to choose other nutritious foods in the morning.

Other *Redbook* articles, however, lost points for overextrapolating from preliminary, unreplicated scientific studies. For example, the September 2004 article “September’s Best Mind and Body Boosters” made much of a very preliminary study indicating that frequent consumption of honey might boost antioxidant levels, inappropriately concluding that if you add honey to your diet, you can avoid cancer. Other articles contained factual errors, such as the statement in the October 2004 article “Eat to Beat Breast Cancer” that folate is a mineral (it is actually a vitamin). Some articles lost points for failing to include important safety information. For example, an item in the previously mentioned “September’s Best Mind and Body Boosters” said that iron supplements could correct attention span problems caused by iron deficiency but failed to note that people should not take iron supplements without consulting a doctor since these supplements are not safe for everyone. And, as was the case with several other magazines, some articles in *Redbook* lost points for not documenting information sources well enough so that interested readers could locate the sources.

Self

(tied for #10; overall score 83%)

Self magazine received a GOOD score of 83% in ACSH's current survey. In the 2000–2002 survey, it scored slightly lower, at 80%.

Self's nutrition articles usually focus on weight control, and some of them are accurate and informative. One example was the June 2004 article "Prevent Pound Rebound," which provided "good practical advice" on how not to gain back lost weight, according to Dr. Manfred Kroger. The March 2005 article "Sip Yourself Slimmer," which cautioned readers not to overlook the calories in beverages and provided advice on how to make lower-calorie beverage choices, also earned high marks.

The judges were much less impressed, though, with the October 2005 article "Eat to Beat Breast Cancer," which wildly overextrapolated preliminary scientific findings and would be more likely to scare readers than to inform them. The article also fell short by advising readers to "eat more fish" without mentioning the limitations on fish consumption recommended for women who are or who may become pregnant. Another article that fared poorly with the judges was the February 2004 compilation "Flash," which included a variety of items that were far too short to cover their topics adequately. For example, an item that noted that British women who drank more than 7.5 pints of beer per week were slightly thinner than nondrinkers failed to note that this amount of beer exceeds the established limit of moderate drinking for women.

Health

(tied for #13; overall score 82%)

Health magazine earned a GOOD score of 82%, placing it in a tie for thirteenth place in ACSH's survey. In 2000–2002, this magazine did considerably better, at 87% and fourth place.

One *Health* article that received high marks from the judges was a sensible, informative weight-loss article from the January/February 2004 issue titled "The Choose the Best, Lose the Rest Diet."

Dr. Ruth Kava commented that this article's "excellent, common-sense approach to healthful eating" could have been enhanced, though, if some mention had been made of increased physical activity. Another article that scored well was December 2004's "Sodium Shakedown," which, as Dr. F.J. Francis pointed out, did a good job of covering its subject despite its brevity.

Other *Health* articles, however, received much lower scores, usually because the authors overextrapolated from preliminary or disputed scientific evidence. For instance, a June 2005 compilation (first item: "California Roll for a Cure") grossly overstated the case for a possible protective effect of seaweed against breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancers (the evidence comes from a study in rats, and people are not rats). The April 2004 article "Olive Oil Pills Are Worth a Taste" recommended supplements of hydroxytyrosol, an antioxidant derived from olive oil, on the basis of evidence from test tube studies (people aren't test tubes full of chemicals, either). And the April 2005 article "Are You Eating Too Little?" placed too much faith in some not-very-well-accepted evidence that calcium promotes weight loss.

Runner's World

(tied for #13; overall score 82%)

Runner's World tied for thirteenth place in ACSH's survey with a GOOD score of 82%. In the 2000–2002 survey, this magazine scored 85%.

Runner's World did a good job with a sophisticated topic of special interest to its readers — the roles of carbohydrate and protein in exercise — in the June 2005 article "Should Your Sports Drink Contain Protein?" In the words of Dr. Irene Berman-Levine, the authors "correctly interpreted and explained very challenging research. This was a truly outstanding way to present truth to the consumer." The October 2005 article "The New Rules of Food," which explained the 2005 changes in both the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the U.S. government's food pyramid, also earned high scores.

Where *Runner's World* fell short was with articles that consisted of compilations of short items.

Some of the brief pieces in these compilations provided sound, sensible advice, but others consisted of unsubstantiated notions. For example, a December 2004 compilation (first item: “Mmmmm...Pastries”) lost points for claiming that the fermented milk product kefir is “a must during the cold and flu season” and for overstating the evidence that the bacteria in kefir may help to lower blood cholesterol and “rid the intestines of cancer-causing agents.” Similarly, a December 2005 compilation (first item: “Magic Garden”) was criticized by the judges for placing too much faith in the health benefits of herbs and for quoting an alternative (orthomolecular) nutritionist as an expert. A June 2004 compilation (first item: “A Full Morning”) was downrated for presenting exaggerated claims about the benefits of green tea extract while providing no documentation whatsoever.

Better Homes and Gardens

(#15, overall score 81%)

Better Homes and Gardens received a GOOD score of 81%, placing it fifteenth in ACSH’s survey. In 2000–2002, this magazine did considerably better, with a fourth place score of 87%.

The July 2005 *Better Homes and Gardens* article “Build Your Own Food Pyramid” did a good job of explaining the 2005 revisions to the U.S. government’s food pyramid, emphasizing the reasons for the changes from “servings” to specific measurements such as ounces and cups, as well as the individualized, personalized nature of the new recommendations and the ways in which consumers can take advantage of the government’s My Pyramid Web site.

Other articles in *Better Homes and Gardens*, however, were marred by factual errors. An April 2005 article on juicing titled “Health by the Glass” stated, incorrectly, that the enzymes in raw, juiced vegetables are of nutritional significance. The January 2000 article “Weight Warriors” inappropriately advised “everyone” to drink 64 to 80 ounces of water each day; this quantity is far too much for some people, including sedentary individuals and small children. The April article “Healthy Snacks” mistakenly stated

that cottage cheese is “a great way” to get calcium; in actuality, cottage cheese is lower in calcium than most other types of cheese and other dairy products such as yogurt. All of these errors could have been caught before they appeared in print if the articles had been reviewed by a registered dietitian or other qualified professional before being submitted for publication. ACSH recommends that all magazines arrange for this type of review in order to avoid publishing incorrect nutrition information.

Prevention

(#16, 80%)

Prevention magazine ranked sixteenth in ACSH’s survey, just barely making it into the GOOD range with a score of 80%. This magazine earned a score of 82% in the 2000–2002 survey.

Unlike some of the other magazines in this survey, *Prevention* actually does a reasonably good job with articles that consist of compilations of short items, often including crucial details and warnings that other magazines omit. For example, a December 2004 compilation (first item: “Holiday No-Splurge Tips”) received good scores from ACSH’s judges, who particularly complimented the magazine for specifying a definition of “one drink” in an item that reported on the potential health benefits of consuming one alcoholic drink per day. ACSH was also pleased that an item in this same compilation on the possible benefits of probiotics in irritable bowel syndrome recommended getting a doctor’s diagnosis first. Irritable bowel syndrome can easily be confused with other ailments that may require different types of treatment; patients need to know what type of digestive condition they are dealing with before trying methods to relieve the symptoms.

Other articles in *Prevention* came in for more criticism from the judges. The basic concept of the July 2004 article “The Perfect Meal,” which presented three menus designed to be “perfect” for staving off heart disease, avoiding breast cancer, and strengthening bones, respectively, was criticized by Dr. Irene Berman-Levine, who noted that “there is no perfect meal to stop dis-

ease.” This article also lost points for inadequate documentation of the sources of some of the scientific information it provided. The judges were also disappointed with a March 2004 “Ask Dr. Weil” column on multiple sclerosis, which made dietary recommendations for people with this condition that are not supported by sound scientific evidence and that could lead to unnecessary restrictions on food choice and nutrient intake — such as avoiding milk products. The column also did not emphasize the tentative nature of the scientific evidence underlying the author’s supplementation recommendations.

Magazines Rated FAIR (70% to 79%)

Men’s Health

(tied for #17, 76%)

Men’s Health earned a FAIR score of 76%, tying it for seventeenth place in ACSH’s survey. In 2000–2002, *Men’s Health* scored 71%.

The best article in *Men’s Health*, according to ACSH’s judges, was the April 2004 article “The Sandwich Showdown,” which compared the nutrient content and taste of the most nutritionally desirable sandwiches served by six national restaurant chains. The only weakness that ACSH’s judges found in this article was that it did not include information on the calorie counts of the sandwiches, although it did provide information on protein, fiber, saturated fat, and sodium.

Other articles in *Men’s Health* had more serious problems, many of which seemed to be linked to the magazine’s editorial style. Reporters for men’s magazines strive for cleverness in their writing style and attention-grabbing content in their articles. Unfortunately, especially in short articles or compilations where space may be at a premium, efforts at cuteness may crowd out useful information, and attempts to attract the reader’s attention can easily slip into sensationalism. Clever wordings can distort facts, and writers can mislead their readers if they fail to include neces-

sary (but potentially dull) caveats about the preliminary nature of certain scientific findings.

Sensationalism showed up often in the *Men’s Health* articles that ACSH’s judges reviewed, and it prompted reduced scores for several articles. For example, the February 2005 article “Eat Right Every Time” lost points for describing high-fructose corn syrup as “liquid obesity.” (It is no more caloric than table sugar and has no unique link to obesity.) A May 2005 compilation article (first item: “Redder Is Better”) lost points for advising readers to avoid instant tea mixes on the grounds of excessive fluoride content on the basis of a single study. And the March 2004 article “Building the Perfect Feast” was downrated for recommending whey (in the form of ricotta cheese) as a cancer fighter on the basis of a study of cells in a laboratory.

Some *Men’s Health* articles also contained factual errors. The July/August 2004 article “The Abs Diet” stated, incorrectly, that whole-grain breads prevent the body from storing fat and that Egg Beaters are nutritionally equivalent to whole eggs. The November 2004 article “Right On, Red” said that creatine is an enzyme. It isn’t. And the previously mentioned article “Build the Perfect Feast” indicated that fructose and high-fructose corn syrup are the same thing. They are not. All of these errors would almost certainly have been caught before publication if the articles had been reviewed by a registered dietitian.

Reader’s Digest

(tied for #17, 76%)

Reader’s Digest received a FAIR score of 76% in ACSH’s current survey. This is substantially lower than the GOOD score of 83% that this magazine received in the two most recent previous ACSH surveys.

The *Reader’s Digest* article that the judges scored highest was the June 2004 short article “Iron Out Fatigue,” which accurately reported the results of a research study on iron and included the warning, “Since iron supplements can cause serious problems in some people, ask your doctor before swallowing any.” Some other magazines that

reported on this same study did not include any mention of this important safety precaution; it's good to see that *Reader's Digest* is more careful.

Other *Reader's Digest* articles, however, had a variety of flaws. The April 2004 article “Foods That Harm, Foods That Heal” overstated both the benefits and risks of the foods it discussed and perpetuated the long-disproven myth that adding mayonnaise to foods increases the risk of food poisoning. A November 2005 compilation article (first item: “The Real Skinny on Soda”) confused fructose with high-fructose corn syrup, leading the author to reach incorrect conclusions about the effects of soft drinks on weight gain. The August 2005 article “Meals That Heal” made no distinction between preliminary scientific evidence and well-established nutrition principles, thereby giving readers no way to determine which of its many dietary suggestions were more important than others. And a August 2005 compilation (first item: “Eat in Vein”) advised readers to seek out the word “hydrogenated” on food labels to indicate the presence of *trans* fats. Actually, though, only *partially* hydrogenated fats contain *trans* fatty acids; *fully* hydrogenated fats do not.⁵

Cosmopolitan

(#19, overall score 75%)

Cosmopolitan received a FAIR score of 75% in the current ACSH survey. In 2000–2002, it also scored in the FAIR range, at 78%.

ACSH's judges gave high scores to two *Cosmopolitan* articles: an October 2004 article on eating disorders titled “When a Diet Turns Deadly” and the September 2005 article “Your Future Fertility: How to Protect It — Starting Now.” Both of these articles were well researched, and both covered their topics thoroughly and accurately.

Unfortunately, however, *Cosmopolitan* also had the dubious distinction of publishing the lowest-scoring article in ACSH's entire survey — the appalling July 2005 article “Detox Diet,” which recommended a weight-loss diet that prohibited

dairy products, fruit, and most grain foods including bread, rice, and pasta. Grossly unhealthful, nutritionally unbalanced fad diets like this one used to appear regularly in popular magazines, but they are now much less common than they used to be. However, as this example illustrates, they are not extinct. ACSH recommends that readers avoid any diet that prohibits one or more major food groups, such as fruit or dairy, unless the diet is recommended by a physician or registered dietitian. Eliminating entire food groups from the diet can lead to nutritional deficiencies.

Other articles in *Cosmopolitan* suffered from the authors' incorrect assumptions that certain unproven notions have been established as facts. The authors of two *Cosmopolitan* articles, the July 2004 article “Food Mistakes All Women Make” and an April 2005 compilation (first item: “Bad Girl Rehab”), made this error when they stated that low-calorie sweeteners increase sugar cravings and therefore prompt people to overeat — an idea that has never been proven. The author of “Food Mistakes All Women Make” also put far too much faith in the unsubstantiated concept that fasting for five hours “slows your metabolism to a halt.”

Muscle and Fitness

(#20, overall score 72%)

Muscle and Fitness earned a FAIR score of 72%, placing it in twentieth (second to last) position in ACSH's survey. This magazine scored 68% in the 2000–2002 survey.

Muscle and Fitness makes an effort to meet the nutrition information needs of its specialized readership of bodybuilders, with varying degrees of success. One of the better articles was the February 2004 “Training Table,” which featured good, common-sense advice about bread products, such as “If you're trying to lose weight, skip the butter, not the bread.” The article also noted that bagels are often larger than the model bagel in nutrition charts and that although whole-grain breads are nutritionally desirable, white bread is not “poison.” These are all valid and helpful points.

5. This article was published before the current requirement for inclusion of *trans* fatty acids in food labeling went into effect. Today's consumers do not need to be aware of the

difference between partially and fully hydrogenated fats in order to determine whether a food product contains *trans* fat. They can simply look at the Nutrition Facts label.

Other articles in *Muscle and Fitness*, however, did not score well. For example, the September 2004 article “Aminos Plus Carbs: The Anabolic Snack” lost points for giving advice on the basis of a single study and for failing to provide any documentation of its information sources. The June 2004 article “Nutrition Rx” was criticized for not pointing out that the digestive enzymes recommended by a bodybuilder quoted in the article are unnecessary; healthy people do not need to take supplements of digestive enzymes. And the January 2004 compilation article “Health and Nutrition” lost points for condemning orange juice because its acid content could be harmful to tooth enamel. Actually, the acid in orange juice is a meaningful dental health threat only for toddlers who take a bottle of it to bed with them; we doubt that this description applies to any of *Muscle and Fitness*’s readers. The same compilation also lost points for “jumping from animal studies to human conclusions without explanation of caveats,” in the words of Dr. Irene Berman-Levine.

Magazine Rated POOR (below 70%)

Men’s Fitness

(#21, overall score 67%)

The lowest-rated magazine in ACSH’s survey was *Men’s Fitness*, which received a POOR score of 67%. In the 2000–2002 survey, it scored 68%. *Men’s Fitness* scored lowest of all of the 21 magazines in this survey in all three rating subcategories: Accuracy, Presentation, and Recommendations.

The best article in *Men’s Fitness*, according to ACSH’s judges, was the September 2005 article “Fish as Firepower,” which provided extensive information on choosing, buying, storing, and cooking fish, along with some mostly accurate information on the nutrition and food safety aspects of fish consumption.

Other articles in *Men’s Fitness*, however, led us to wonder whether this magazine is in the business

of publishing fiction. The most notable example was the March 2005 article “The Best and Worst Foods a Man Can Eat,” which managed to make inaccurate, exaggerated, or undocumented statements about most of the 54 foods it evaluated. The lack of documentation was a real disappointment; we would have loved to read the studies that allegedly show that “guys who eat bran cereal frequently are happier, more alert, and have greater energy levels than guys who don’t” or those that demonstrate that “alcohol plus a steak dinner works like lighter fluid on your metabolism.”

The statements quoted above may be silly, but they are unlikely to do real harm. On the other hand, the article’s unproven claim that “apples help to counteract damage from inhaled cigarette smoke” is a real concern. Cigarette smokers should not be misled into thinking that their dietary choices can minimize the risks of smoking; this kind of misinformation could decrease their motivation to kick the cigarette habit.

And that’s not all that was wrong with this article. For example, while we would never argue that French fries are one of the best dietary choices, the article’s claim that they are the new “cancer sticks” because of their acrylamide content is alarmist and misleading; as Dr. Ruth Kava noted, “acrylamide has never been shown to cause cancer in people.” Also, in addition to the errors already mentioned, the article 1) stated that fast food burgers are high in fat, but that those grilled at home are not (in reality, both are likely to get most of their calories from fat); 2) argued that the calories in fruit juice are more likely than those in whole fruit to be stored as body fat (the scientific evidence does not support this idea); 3) promoted the consumption of anchovies but condemned cottage cheese on the basis of its sodium content (anchovies contain much more sodium than cottage cheese does); and 4) claimed that “compounds in fresh berries work like Drano, inhibiting the buildup of ‘bad’ LDL cholesterol in your arteries” (if any such effect were strong enough to be meaningful, doctors would prescribe berries instead of statins). We have rarely seen so many myths, misconceptions, and unproven notions in a single article.

Conclusions — and ACSH's Recommendations to Magazines and Their Readers

The quality of nutrition reporting in popular magazines seems to have reached a plateau. The long period of consistent improvement from the 1980s to the 1990s to the beginning of the current decade seems to have ended. Fortunately, most major magazines, with the possible exception of health and fitness magazines for men, are doing a reasonably good job of providing their readers with sound nutrition information. The dangerous weight-loss diets and unwarranted claims for dietary supplements that once dominated popular magazines' coverage of nutrition are now rare. But there is still room for further improvement.

ACSH recommends that magazines that want to improve their coverage of nutrition consider doing the following:

1. Require all writers to document their sources of information well enough so that readers can track down those sources.
2. Do not allow writers to advise readers to change their eating or supplementation habits on the basis of preliminary scientific evidence. "Preliminary" means a single human study or findings from animal or cell culture experiments that have not been confirmed in human beings.
3. Edit articles consisting of compilations of short items with greater care, and avoid discussing complex topics or those with important safety implications in such items.
4. Have all articles reviewed for factual accuracy by a registered dietitian or other qualified health professional before publication.

ACSH believes that readers can continue to rely on magazines as useful sources of nutrition information but that they should be cautious about adopting any new dietary or supplementation practices on the basis of magazine articles alone.

Although the quality of nutrition reporting in most major magazines is relatively good, not everything that appears in print is scientifically sound or even safe. Readers should especially beware of information published in magazines that earned a FAIR or POOR rating in ACSH's survey and of information published in short articles or articles that consist of compilations of brief news items. In most magazines, the quality of short pieces is poorer than the quality of full-length articles.

If you're considering making a change in your eating habits on the basis of something you read in a magazine article, we suggest that you do the following:

1. *Consider the source of the information.* Look first at the magazine in which the article was published. Did it rank low or high in ACSH's survey? Also, ask where the author obtained the information that forms the basis of the article's recommendations. Did it come from a trustworthy source that reflects a scientific consensus, such as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans? Or did it come from a single scientific study, perhaps one that was conducted in animals or cultured cells, rather than people? Can you even figure out where the author obtained the information? If no source at all is given, beware.
2. *Consider the length of the article.* Short articles, or short items within longer compilation articles, often do not provide enough information to cover a topic adequately and they tend to be more error-ridden than longer articles are. Sometimes, crucial safety information is omitted (for example, the item may mention that a particular dietary supplement had a beneficial effect but neglect to warn that certain groups of people cannot take this type of supplement safely). You may want to seek out other information to supplement these snippets.
3. *Consider whether the information in the article is consistent with the principles of good nutrition.* To do this, you need to be familiar

with some basic nutrition concepts. Good places to look for basic nutrition information include the websites devoted to the federal government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans (<http://www.health.gov/DietaryGuidelines/>) and the food pyramid (<http://www.mypyramid.gov/>). You can also find reliable information on nutrition and a wide variety of other health topics at the National Library of Medicine's consumer health site, MedlinePlus (<http://medlineplus.gov/>). Once you know the basics, you'll find it easier to distinguish well-accepted ideas from outlandish ones.

4. *Consider whether you need to check with your doctor or a registered dietitian before making a change.* If you're considering a drastic change in your diet, it's prudent to discuss it with your doctor before you proceed. If you have any type of ongoing health problem or if you're considering making changes in your child's diet, talking to a doc-

tor is especially important. If you take any kind of medication, you should definitely ask your doctor before starting to take any new dietary supplement; some supplements can interact in detrimental ways with medications. In general, you should not adopt any eating pattern that excludes one or more of the basic food groups (grains, vegetables, fruit, dairy products, and meat and other protein foods) or take any dietary supplement that provides substantially more than 100% of the recommended intake of any nutrient without the approval of your physician. If you need help in changing your diet, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian, or contact the American Dietetic Association for referral to one in your locality (http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/home_4874_ENU_HTML.htm).

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University of Illinois College of Medicine

Lynn Waishwell, Ph.D., C.H.E.S.
University of Medicine and Dentistry of

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F.A.C.P.

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Wilmington, NC

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National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism

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Nutrition Institute, University of

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Ekhard E. Ziegler, M.D.
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