

NUTRITION INFORMATION AND THE MEDIA

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The print media is ideal for the learning of detailed and conceptual knowledge, what good health means, the seriousness of its outcome, and the nutritive value of food (Emery 1982).

On the basis of this statement, two Queensland newspapers and six Australian women's magazines were surveyed to evaluate the extent and usefulness of the nutrition-related articles they published. The newspapers were studied for a four-month period and the magazines for one year (1984).

The articles were assessed using rating-scales based on (i) the scientific validity of the articles; (ii) the nutritional adequacy of any diets published; (iii) how the information related to established nutrition-education tools, such as the Dietary Guidelines for Australians; (iv) the reputation of the 'nutrition expert' quoted.

The newspaper articles were classified according to whether they contained nutrition information, were about people and food, advertisements, or were about food-related topics such as recipes and cooking techniques. The articles were qualitatively rated on a scale from zero to 18; a score of zero denoting that they were of no use for nutrition education, 18 that they were extremely useful and a negative score indicating nutrition misinformation. The results are shown in the following table.

Newspaper articles and their rating for nutrition education

	Classification of articles			
	Nutrition Information	People and food	Advertisements	Food-related articles
Total No. of articles	46	7	36	22
No. from daily paper	33	4	27	15
No. from afternoon paper	13	3	9	7
Range of scores	-3-18	0-7	-2-5	0-18

The magazine articles which contained nutrition information covered a wide range of topics. A popular topic was vitamin B₆. Twenty-four articles recommending the use of vitamin B₆ tablets appeared in the magazines surveyed during 1984. Dosages recommended varied from 100 mg daily to "fairly high quantities". Vitamin B₆ can be toxic at intakes of around 2 g daily (Rudman and Williams 1983). In these articles, vitamin B₆ was recommended for a variety of reasons. For most of these reasons there is no conclusive scientific evidence to justify such recommendations.

The implications of these findings for nutrition scientists and educators will be discussed.

EMERY, H. (1982) *J.Fd. Nutr.* 39:94

RUDMAN, D., WILLIAMS, P.J. (1983) *New Engl. J. Med.* 309:488.

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