

# That's a claim!



## Guides for students and teachers to think critically about health claims

**BEWARE**

Too good to be true  
**"100% effective!"**

Most claims that a treatment will make you 100% better or that it works for everyone turn out to be wrong.

**BEWARE**

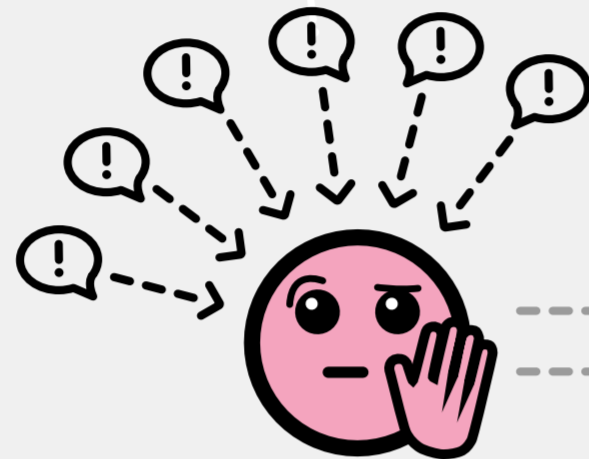
Too good to be true  
**"100% safe!"**

People often think about the benefits of treatments and ignore possible harms. But few treatments that work are 100% safe.

**BEWARE**

Too good to be true  
**100% certain!**

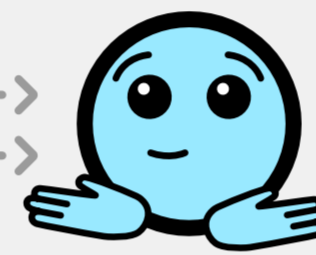
We can rarely, if ever, be 100% certain about the effects of treatments.



**BEWARE**  
of claims



**THINK 'FAIR'**  
about the evidence



**TAKE CARE**  
when you decide

**TAKE CARE**

Right problem and options  
**What is your problem and what are your options?**

Make sure that you understand what the health problem is that you are thinking about treating, and that you know what your choices are. Works for everyone turn out to be wrong.

**TAKE CARE**

Relevant evidence  
**What outcomes matter to you?**

Always ask yourself whether the treatment outcomes that are important to you have been checked in fair comparisons.

**TAKE CARE**

Relevant evidence  
**Are the people (or animals) very different?**

Always ask yourself if the treatment comparisons included only people (or animals) that are very different from you.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"Treatment needed!"**

People who are sick often get better without a treatment. Sometimes a treatment does not help and may even make things worse.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"No comparison needed!"**

Unless a treatment is compared to something else, it is not possible to know what would happen without it.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"It works like this!"**

Treatments that should work in theory often do not work in practice.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Unfair comparison  
**Dissimilar comparison groups**

Look out for treatment comparisons where the comparison groups were not alike.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Unfair comparison  
**Dissimilar care**

Look out for treatment comparisons where the comparison groups were cared for differently.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Unfair comparison  
**Dissimilar expectations**

Look out for treatment comparisons where people knew which treatment they received and knowing that could have changed how they felt or behaved.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Unfair comparison  
**Dissimilar measurement**

Look out for treatment comparisons where what happened was measured differently in the comparison groups.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Unfair comparison  
**Lots of missing people**

Look out for treatment comparisons where what happened was not measured in lots of people.

**TAKE CARE**

Advantages and disadvantages  
**Are the advantages better than the disadvantages?**

Always ask yourself whether the possible advantages of a treatment are better than the disadvantages of the treatment.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"A study shows!"**

If one treatment comparison (study) shows that people who got one treatment did better or worse than people who got something else, it does not mean that is the final answer.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"Associated with!"**

Just because using a treatment is linked (associated) with people getting better or worse, that doesn't mean that the treatment made them better or worse.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"Old is better!"**

Just because a treatment has been used for a long time or by many people, it does not mean that it helps or that it is safe.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"New is better!"**

Just because a treatment is new, expensive, or brand-named does not mean that it is better or safer than other treatments.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Untrustworthy summary  
**Uncareful summary**

Look out for summaries of studies comparing treatments that were not done carefully.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Tricky description  
**Just words**

Look out for treatment effects that are described just using words.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Tricky description  
**Few people or events**

Look out for treatment effects that are based on small studies with few people.

**THINK 'FAIR'**

Tricky description  
**No evidence**

Look out for a "lack of evidence" being described as evidence of "no difference".

**TAKE CARE**

Advantages and disadvantages  
**How sure are you?**

Always ask yourself how sure you are that the possible advantages of a treatment are better than and the possible disadvantages of the treatment.

**BEWARE**

Faulty logic  
**"More is better!"**

Taking more of a treatment often increases harms without increasing how much it helps.

**BEWARE**

Trust alone  
**"As advertised!"**

Someone with an interest in getting people to use a treatment, such as making money, may exaggerate benefits and ignore possible harmful effects.

**BEWARE**

Trust alone  
**"It worked for me!"**

If someone got better after using a treatment it does not necessarily mean that the treatment made them better.

**BEWARE**

Trust alone  
**"Recommended by experts!"**

Just because a treatment claim is made by an expert or authority, you cannot be sure that it is trustworthy.

**BEWARE** of claims that have a bad basis

Many claims about the effects of treatments are not trustworthy. Often this is because the reason (the basis) for the claim is not trustworthy. You should be careful when you hear claims that are:

- Too good to be true
- Based on faulty logic
- Based on trust alone

**THINK 'FAIR'**- and check the evidence from treatment comparisons

Evidence from comparisons of treatments can fool you. You should think carefully about the evidence that is used to support claims about the effects of treatments. Look out for:

- Unfair comparisons of treatments
- Uncareful summaries of comparisons
- How treatment effects are described

**TAKE CARE** - and make good choices

Good treatment choices depend on thinking carefully about what to do. Think carefully about:

- What your problem is and what your options are
- Whether the evidence is relevant to your problem and options
- Whether the advantages are better than the disadvantages

**Introduction**

What do you do when you burn your finger? Some people say "Cow poo will cure your burn." They say that because when they had a burn, they used cow poo and their burn got better. That was their personal experience. But is it possible that their burn would have got better without cow poo?

There are lots of **claims** like this about what is good for our health. A claim is something someone says that can be right or wrong.

A **treatment** is something you do for your health—for example, taking a medicine, exercising, or even putting your finger in cow poo. A treatment effect is something a treatment makes happen—like making you feel better or worse, making you stronger, or curing a burn.

People make lots of claims about **treatment effects**. How can we tell which claims are right or wrong? To do this, you need to look at what supports their claim - its basis. For example, someone's personal experience is not a good basis for a claim about what is good for your health. This is because we don't know what would have happened if that person had done something else.

To know if a treatment (like putting cow poo on a burn) causes an effect (like a burn getting better), the treatment has to be **compared** to something else (like not putting cow poo on a burn). That way we can see what would happen if people did something else. Researchers compare a treatment given to people in one group with something else given to people in another group. Those comparisons provide **evidence** - facts to support a conclusion about whether a claim about treatment effects is right or wrong. For those **comparisons to be fair**, the only important difference between the groups should be the treatments they receive.

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