

Nutrimedia, a resource that assesses the veracity of messages about food and nutrition

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The journal *PLOS ONE* has published an article that explains the methodology used by Nutrimedia to assess the veracity of messages

about nutrition. As reflected in the article, the Nutrimedia project, developed by the Science Communication Observatory (OCC) of the Department of Communication at Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) and by the Iberoamerican Cochrane Center, is a pioneer in the application of the GRADE method to determine the extent to which messages concerning nutrition contained in news items and advertisements in the media or posed by the public are true.

During its first 18 months, the Nutrimedia project has analysed the veracity of 30 nutrition-related messages, of which 21 are related to food, 6 to diets, and 3 to food supplements. According to their degree of truthfulness, the messages were classified into seven categories: true, probably true, possibly true, false, probably false, possibly false and uncertain. As described in the article published in *PLOS ONE*, almost half (14 out of 30) were classified as uncertain (for example, "chocolate is good for the heart" or "eating garlic reduces the risk of cancer") and four possibly true ("meat is carcinogenic" or "white bread is more fattening than wholemeal bread").

"Many answers to questions about food and health are uncertain or have a low degree of certainty because they are questions that have barely been studied or have been dealt with in studies of low quality," says Gonzalo Casino, director of Nutrimedia, UPF lecturer and head of knowledge transfer at the Iberoamerican Cochrane Center. "Nutrimedia aims to teach the public why the certainty of science varies and how to interpret the messages broadcast in the media and social networks critically."

Nutrimedia's most unique feature is its methodology. "The GRADE system is a method adopted by many [scientific organizations](#) to determine the degree of certainty of their research outcomes. And what we have done that is groundbreaking at Nutrimedia is to apply this method to assess the veracity of nutritional messages that reach the

public," explains Pablo Alonso, a researcher at Nutrimedia and at the Iberoamerican Cochrane Center, as well as being head of the GRADE centre in Spain.

"It should be noted that 12 messages analysed come from questions raised by the public, nine myths or popular beliefs, eight press news items, and two ads," explains Montserrat Rabassa, a researcher at Nutrimedia and at the Iberoamerican Cochrane Center and first author of the *PLOS ONE* article. "The question that most interested the public was whether or not meat is carcinogenic, according to what we found out through a survey we conducted. The page that deals with this issue is one of the most visited at Nutrimedia and one of the first two or three hits returned by Google Spain when searching "meat and cancer," Rabassa reveals.

This presence in the search engines is proof of the considerable impact that the Nutrimedia project has had in the media: during its first 18 months, it was cited 84 times in the printed press and 386 on websites of Spain and of 14 other countries, most in Latin America, as evidenced in the article published in *PLOS ONE*. "The scientific rigour combined with the use of friendly presentation formats are distinctive features of this resource, developed to help the public to make informed choices about nutrition," the authors of the article write.

More information: Montserrat Rabassa et al, Nutrimedia: A novel web-based resource for the general public that evaluates the veracity of nutrition claims using the GRADE approach, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0232393](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232393)

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