GLP podcast and video: Why so many nutrition studies are wrong; Steve Kirsch—tech entrepreneur turned anti-vaccine guru; Confidence makes you seem smarter

Much of the nutrition research that attracts media attention is deeply flawed. A new study explains why. Silicon Valley tech guru Steve Kirsch went from obscure entrepreneur to anti-vaccine celebrity. What led him down that troubling path? Confident people appear more intelligent to those around them. This odd quirk of human evolution has important implications for science communication efforts.

Podcast:

Video:

Join host Dr. Liza Dunn and GLP contributor Cameron English on episode 226 of Science Facts and Fallacies as they break down these latest news stories:

- **Viewpoint: Misleading guidance — Why so many nutrition studies get the basic science so wrong**

Whether it’s sugar, fat or protein; meat, candy or soda, many nutrition studies focus on the potential health risks or benefits of eating a single nutrient or food. The results of this research are straightforward, widely covered in the press—and often wrong. Human nutrition is much more complicated than individual nutrients, as it turns out. What can we do as discerning consumers of media (and food) to properly assess the studies that we see in the headlines?

- **Scientific 180? One tech multi-millionaire’s journey from evidence-based advocate to COVID misinformation missionary**

Steve Kirsch made a fortune as an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley. At the beginning of the pandemic, he was poised to make an important public health contribution by establishing the Covid-19 Early Treatment Fund (CETF). The non-profit went to work investigating FDA-approved drugs as potential off-label treatments for COVID-19. Then Kirsch went off the rails.

Although he recruited respected scientists to conduct the foundation’s research, he began disputing their results if they weren’t to his liking. For example, the anti-depressant fluvoxamine seemed effective against the virus in preliminary studies, but subsequent research has yet to produce conclusive results. Kirsch nevertheless insisted that the drug’s usefulness as a COVID treatment was being suppressed. That conclusion eventually led him to the belief that a campaign was underway to minimize the efficacy of existing drugs so pharma companies could sell their vaccines.

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Confidence heuristic: Why humans are biologically programmed to follow self-assured, poised people

Research shows that confident people inspire trust in those around them. Part of this appeal stems from the perception that confidence is indicative of intelligence. Such a trait was quite useful throughout human history as people rallied around self-assured leaders who could guide them through dangerous circumstances. Of course, confidence has a downside: ignorant people can be confident, too. There’s an important lesson here for scientists who want to communicate with the public.

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