

Lesson 4: Health and Fitness Advertising

Introduction

An important aspect of becoming an effective consumer is to be critical of the advertising associated with many of the health and/or fitness products and services available. People must be able to determine which advertisements are based on facts and research, and which make claims based on incomplete or inaccurate information. Manufacturers selling some fitness products base their advertising on many of the myths surrounding fitness development. Advertisers are very clever and creative with their “pitches,” making the advertised products seem amazing and revolutionary. The end result is that they make their sales, and the uninformed, trusting consumer is often left with inferior products that may, but likely will not, live up to expectations.

This lesson focuses on the advertising of health and fitness products. Students have the opportunity to examine and assess advertisements for health and fitness products and learn how to identify the language of advertising to avoid disappointment and deception (fraud).

REFERENCE



For additional information, refer to the following website:

Federal Trade Commission (FTC). “Pump Fiction: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment.” Nov. 2003. *FTC Facts for Consumers*.
<www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/products/pro10.shtm>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Specific Learning Outcome

12.FM.5 Examine the methods advertisers use to promote and sell exercise, fitness, and health products and services.



Key Understandings

- Advertising is used to promote and sell products and services.
- Accurate information is needed to evaluate advertising claims.
- Advertisers use multiple strategies to sell their products and services.



Essential Questions

1. What strategies and ploys are used to sell exercise, fitness, and health products and services?
 2. Why do advertisers make product claims, and what types of claims do they make?
 3. How do advertisers address the FITT (frequency, intensity, time, type) principle when advertising their fitness and exercise products?
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Background Information

Evaluating Advertising Claims*

The benefits of an active healthy lifestyle are well-known and well-documented. Unfortunately, there remain many myths and misunderstandings about how the body responds to exercise and physical activity, as discussed in the previous lesson. Advertising and marketing businesses for fitness products and services are aware of these misunderstandings and make advertising claims based on them. Many unscrupulous advertisers make unsupported claims that their exercise products offer quick, almost effortless ways to shape up, keep fit, and/or lose weight. The reality about changing the body is that there is no effortless, perspiration-free way to maintain a fit and healthy body. Deriving the benefits of exercise requires doing the necessary work.

Being informed, or possessing the ability to find reliable information, is the way to navigate through false claims in advertising. The consumer must be cautious or suspicious of any products that

- claim to make the body more attractive
- promise amazing results in a very short period of time

It takes time and effort to make changes to the human body.

Although some manufacturers of fitness products can provide independent research to support what they are saying about their products, many manufacturers rely on exaggerated and fraudulent claims to sell their products.

* Source of Adaptation: Federal Trade Commission (FTC). "Pump Fiction: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment." Nov. 2003. *FTC Facts for Consumers*. <www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/products/pro10.shtm>.

Some key elements found in advertisements should alert consumers to the possibility of false advertising. When detecting key elements such as the following, consumers should become wary of questionable exercise products:

- **Easy, effortless, and fast:** Machines and other devices that are advertised as “guaranteeing” the user certain results in a short time should be ignored. The benefits of exercise cannot be stored, and the body needs time to adapt and change. In other words, change comes with time and effort. Advertisements that promise easy or effortless results are simply false.
- **“Spot” reducing:** One of the most appealing claims, yet also one of the most inaccurate and false claims, is that a product can reduce the fat from a particular part of the body. The most popular body parts targeted by these advertisements are the buttocks, hips, and stomach. Achieving a major change in appearance requires sensible eating and regular exercise that works the whole body.
- **Faster than others:** The claims that one machine will produce results faster than other similar machines is difficult to evaluate, especially when there are no independent scientific studies to substantiate the claims. Arguably, any equipment that helps a person exercise several major body parts will likely burn more calories than equipment that works only one body part. Everyone responds to exercise differently. Finding the right frequency, intensity, time/duration, and type (FITT) of exercise is the key.
- **The fine print:** If there is fine print, even in a television commercial, then there is something the advertisement is trying to hide. Sometimes the fine print mentions a diet or “program” that must be used in conjunction with the equipment. Even if it doesn’t, remember that diet and exercise together are much more effective for weight loss than either diet or exercise alone.
- **Testimonials:** Be wary of verbal or visual testimonials such as “before” and “after” pictures from “satisfied” customers. Their experiences are not typical, which is why their testimonials are being used. Just because one person has had success doesn’t mean someone else will get the same results. Many of the “customers” are paid by the companies, and the endorsements, whether they are from consumers, celebrities, or star athletes, don’t mean the equipment is right for you. Another consideration is that, with current technology, pictures can easily be altered. In fact, some before and after pictures are not even of the same person.
- **Final total cost:** The advertised cost of a product usually does not include shipping and handling fees, sales tax, and delivery and set-up fees. Determine the final cost of the purchase by calculating the terms of purchase (e.g., “Three easy payments of . . .” or “Pay only \$49.95 a month.”). Inquire about all the monetary details before ordering a product.
- **Guarantees and warranties:** Get details on warranties, guarantees, and return policies before making a purchase. Some guarantees (e.g., “30-day money-back guarantee”) may not sound as good as you were led to believe if you have to pay shipping on a large, bulky piece of equipment you want to return.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Ad Analysis

Have students bring to class fitness and/or health advertisements from a variety of media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, Internet, television) and examine the ads as a class. Have each student identify

- the product or service being sold in a given ad
- the consumer demographic being targeted
- the ploys used to sell the product or service (e.g., language, sexuality, testimonial)
- the claims made (expected benefits)
- the dubious claims made (if any)
- the cost and payment options presented

As a class, identify the similarities and differences between the ads. Which ads are the most misleading, most effective, and most legitimate? Discuss why. Select a few ads and determine what knowledge the consumer would need in order to make an informed buying decision based on the information presented in the ad? Use the FITT principle and other training principles to evaluate the advertising claims.

REFERENCE



For information on the FITT principle, see Module B, Lesson 6, of the following resource:

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. *Grade 11 Active Healthy Lifestyles: Manitoba Physical Education/Health Education Curriculum Framework of Outcomes and A Foundation for Implementation*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/curriculum.html.