

CONSUMER GUIDE:

How To Identify Misinformation and Misleading “Research” as Marketing



As cannabis products continue to gain popularity, it’s important for consumers to be aware of misleading product claims and headlines used to sell more and more products. **Misinformation** or inconclusive and sparse scientific evidence can manipulate Americans to buy products that ultimately benefit industry manufacturers at consumers’ expense. Cannabis products are often touted as “curative” or “mitigating” options for a host of medical conditions, including anxiety, depression, arthritis, and even cancer, but there has been little to no thorough, clinical research to support these types of claims. While early studies can demonstrate promise, those studies alone cannot be compared to the large, randomized, placebo-controlled trials used to demonstrate safety and efficacy in accordance with FDA standards.

Consumers should learn how to spot “**research as marketing**” tactics, identify misleading and exaggerated statistics and understand how to interpret studies often cited in promotions and headlines.

BE WARY OF:



Language that boasts the product as a “**cure**” or “**treatment**” for any health issue



Products touting that “**all natural**” is safe, yet have no proven safety information



Studies that were **only conducted in cells or animals**, not those conducted on humans



Studies with small, under or **misrepresented populations**



Consumer Testimonials or “**Expert**” **Opinions** as evidence that the product works



Citing **early-stage clinical trials** as proof that a product works



Upselling or trying to get consumers to purchase more



Observational studies that **show correlation but not causation**. These may indicate a connection between two phenomena, but do not control for confounding factors. For example, there may be an association between ice cream sales and drowning deaths, but that doesn’t mean increased ice cream consumption causes drownings.

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Cannabis manufacturers, researchers, healthcare professionals, and consumers should *all* want more thorough research into cannabis and cannabinoids’ therapeutic potential and clear guidelines to make the marketplace safer including:



Thorough testing through all three phases of clinical trials to uncover and ensure products are safe and effective



Randomized, placebo-controlled clinical studies **to remove any biases** in research findings



Studies conducted in patients **who have the relevant syndrome or disease** using a specific route of administration and defined dosing



Packaging guidelines to ensure proper dosing and side effect information is provided



Regulatory oversight to ensure a consistent and contaminant-free products



Ongoing monitoring and reporting of adverse events to ensure safety information is updated



Regulatory oversight ensuring consistent cannabis-derived formulations to allow more **accurate scientific findings**



Congress and the FDA can and should help ensure a safe cannabis marketplace, and further incentivize research in this space. Until then, it is critical that consumers do not rely solely on advertisements and headlines and instead consult a medical professional who understands how cannabis use can impact their health.