

# The curious case of apple cider vinegar



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Sometimes you read something or hear something so baffling you almost believe it on the basis that it can't be made up. For me, one of those happens to be apple cider vinegar, and its health benefits. Someone has clearly thought 'I know what I'll do – I'll drink this stuff for a month and see what happens' and it worked – how else would they know?

Last month I was doing my usual afternoon perusing of Instagram when I noticed Lottie Manahan, one hygienist (yes, we're all friends now) that I follow, started taking an article extolling the 'health virtues' of apple cider vinegar to task. How could someone be so irresponsible not to think about the thing's point of entry – i.e. the mouth. A valid point, and one shared by any dental professional reading the posts.

And then it happened again. I overheard a personal trainer in the gym tell one of their clients a shot of cider vinegar or warm honey first thing in the morning would kickstart their metabolism and help them lose weight faster. After their session ended, I asked the PT where they got the information from. 'A health food blogger', was the reply.

In a world where saying what you want on social media platforms and not being challenged on its authenticity or validity is widespread, we usually think of politicians and people in positions of authority. You only need to look at how the General Election in December went to see how dangerous that can be. But increasingly in a vanity and health conscious world, science and healthcare are not immune from the same

kind of misinformation being touted by those we believe to be experts in their field.

It is a thread Aoife Keogh and Barbara Chadwick picked up in one of the December issues of the *BDJ*,<sup>1</sup> analysing whether health food bloggers were 'friends or foe'. They randomly selected four bloggers from the Amazon top 10 booklist and consulted their online blogs for a selection of recipes which were then nutritionally analysed in relation to their sugar and fat content. The results? A whopping 80% of the recipes analysed contained more fat than a Mars bar and 70% contained more fat than a popular online cake recipe, while 25% of the recipes contained over half of the recommended daily sugar intake as advised by the SACN and the WHO. Crucially, not one of the bloggers analysed used evidence-based approaches for the advice on their blogs – one even clearly stated they had no qualifications in nutrition or dietetics, but rather their knowledge was garnered from 'following years of research, personal studies, case studies and our experience with nutrition'.

When you consider the value of the health and wellness market in the UK increased from over 20.5 billion euro in 2015 to almost 23 billion euro in 2018, you begin to see the size of the problem we face.<sup>2</sup> How can we tell patients not to do something when they've seen it from an influential social media 'expert' that it's good for them? How do we do that when they're young patients? How do we have these conversations about so-called 'health foods'? Do we resign ourselves to the fact in five-or-so years' time we'll be seeing

that young patient on a GA list? Do we resign ourselves to seeing that patients simply ignore any advice they're given? And perhaps most alarmingly, do we resign ourselves to the fact that to a generation with access to whatever information they want, facts simply do not matter to them anymore?

It should be our drive to ensure everything we do and every piece of advice given is firmly grounded in the vast swathes of evidence available to the profession. Keogh and Chadwick concluded that: 'As healthcare providers it is important for us to be aware of where our patients are sourcing their healthcare information. A knowledge of popular 'healthy' social media bloggers may provide a useful insight into our patients' lifestyles and enable us to provide specific advice, tailored to that patient.' While I commend their sentiment that we need to be aware of the world around us, I don't imagine many dentists in the latter half of their careers even knowing what an influencer is, let alone knowing where to look for one. Instead the responsibility rests on collaboration between – for example – Public Health England, GPs and GDPs – to ensure each pillar can reinforce to patients and the wider public the dangers of non evidence-based information. ♦

## References

1. Keogh A and Chadwick B. Health food blogger: friend or foe? *Br Dent J* 2019; **227**: 1051-1057.
2. Statista. Market value of health and wellness in the United Kingdom from 2015 to 2020. Available online at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/491348/health-and-wellness-united-kingdom-uk-market-value/> (Accessed January 2020).