
Guidelines for Interacting with the Media

The Importance of Experts for Food Biotechnology Media Stories

Food biotechnology is an interesting and complex topic, and information about current and potential applications for biotechnology regularly appears in all types of media—newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet, as well as social media. In developing their stories, journalists are often looking for experts on the subject to help answer questions, provide additional details, and/or respond to challenges against foods produced through biotechnology. These expert authorities not only provide much needed information, but they also add balance and credibility to the story. Experts can help make the complex subject of food biotechnology more consumer-friendly by explaining scientific advancements and techniques in a way that is easily understood by the general public.

YOU CAN BE THE EXPERT

Developing effective media relationships is one of the best ways to position yourself as an expert on the subject. Strong relationships with the appropriate media representatives also increase the likelihood that your message or information will generate press coverage and reach your target audience—the public. As an authority on food biotechnology, you will be able to inform the media about the latest advancements, correct misinformation, and dispel myths.

Print and online newspapers and magazines, television, and radio have large networks that provide the distribution power to carry important information directly to your target audience. The key is to know which form(s) of media are best for communicating your message, and which media “gatekeeper” needs your expertise in communicating a story to a particular segment of the population.

YOU CAN BE THE FIRST SOURCE

If you receive word that a media outlet or individual reporter is working on a story, you can increase your chances of having your information



included by proactively contacting them directly and offering them your expertise, before they go elsewhere to get information.

WHO YOU SHOULD REACH OUT TO

- Those who produce and report the news (editors, researchers, and writers/reporters for print; producers, researchers, and reporters for broadcast); and
- Those who develop community affairs programs and manage public service advertising (public service directors).



MEDIA TIPS

- Guidelines for Interacting with the Media
- Improving Public Understanding: Guidelines for Communicating Emerging Science on Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health

Tips for Participating in Social Media

- ❑ Practice
- ❑ Be Transparent
- ❑ Make Time for Social Media
- ❑ Disclose



Regardless of the types of media outlets and activities you decide to use, it is essential to develop a relationship with media professionals through understanding and meeting their needs.

WHAT YOUR STORY SHOULD CONTAIN

Whether you are tapping into news, public service programming, or entertainment media, reporters and producers seek similar story elements:

1. Audience appeal and relevance to readers
2. Issues that stimulate debate, controversy, and even conflict—in short, “drama”
3. Stories that are popular on a broad scale
4. Fresh angles and twists on an issue that have not been seen before
5. Timeliness with new or breaking stories

ENGAGE WITH THE MEDIA

Journalists, reporters, and consumers regularly look to social media channels for information. In addition, engaging in different social media platforms is essential to sharing your message with an audience that previously might not have been accessible.

SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to traditional “mainstream” media, social media has emerged as an effective tool for communicating directly with the public and members of the media. With a well-established social media presence, you can reach a large audience with your message in a matter of minutes.

Social media is about connecting with people and creating and forging relationships. As with any community, social media provides an avenue to tend to those relationships.

Social media is available any time of day or night, as long as you have an Internet connection, making it possible to communicate whenever it is convenient for you.

One challenge of social media is verifying the source or accuracy of information. As a result, misinformation can spread like wildfire. However, having a social media presence allows you to participate in the conversation, dispel myths and/or share additional information that can help provide important balance to the dialogue.

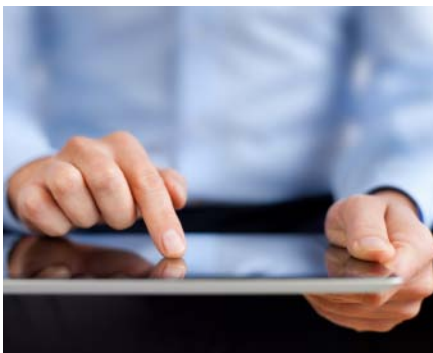
Your Social Media Strategy

There are many types of social media, which can be overwhelming for someone just starting out. Focusing your efforts on one or two types of social media at first will increase your comfort and impact in those areas.

You will be able to make better decisions on where and how you spend your time on social media if you develop a strategy. Ask yourself: What is my goal in using social media? Is it to:

- Engage with the media or popular online influencers to provide expertise for stories?
- Share new research and information on biotechnology?
- Monitor conversations and sentiment on particular topics and correct misinformation?
- Host regular discussions on biotechnology developments?
- Influence my target audience using social media?

Although it is easy to dabble in social media, it is important to answer these questions in order to form a strategic approach and integrate social media with overall communications planning.



TIPS FOR PARTICIPATING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Practice: The more you participate in social media, the more comfortable you will become. Start by creating accounts and experimenting with them. When you feel ready, you can “announce” your presence.

Be Transparent: No matter which platform you use, it is important to have a strong online profile. You only have a few words to make a first impression and entice people to “follow” or “friend” you, “like” your page, or subscribe to your blog.

If possible, include a professional photo or logo and provide information about your credentials, training, expertise, interests and/or role at your organization. Think about how you stand out from others so you can attract a following.

Make Time for Social Media: It takes time to build an effective social media presence. To get into the habit of using social media, block off time on your calendar every day and make it a part of your daily routine.

There are tools to help you save time on social media. For example, HootSuite (www.HootSuite.com) has a free online program for scheduling tweets, blog posts, and messages. Since technology evolves rapidly, it is a good idea to search the Internet or App store to find the latest tools. The various social media platforms can also be integrated so you can publish just once and it will appear on all of your pages.

Disclose: If you are posting on behalf of an organization, be sure to comply with its social media policy. Your organization likely has statements about disclosure in the social media policy.

As a rule of thumb, disclose any potential conflicts of interest up front. Broadly speaking, be aware of the legal implications of any media work that you do.

Handling Controversial Topics

There are many diverse opinions about food biotechnology among various groups and individuals. Therefore, as food biotechnology news breaks, there will likely be controversial discussions occurring in social media. This presents an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the public and provide science-based information to enable consumer understanding.

At some point, you will likely come across someone who disagrees with you. The best way to handle negative comments is to professionally and courteously answer the question, providing links and references. If there is still no resolution, agree to disagree. Some individuals just want to get a reaction out of you or discredit you. It is not a good use of your time to try to reason with them. If you feel your “buttons getting pushed,” wait a couple of hours to respond and/or ask a friend or colleague to read your response and offer suggestions. This will prevent rash posts “in the heat of the moment.” Remember, as with traditional media, posts in social media cannot always be easily deleted.

Getting “Personal” on Social Media

While social media is about sharing and building relationships, some people are confused about how much sharing is appropriate. You should only share what you are comfortable sharing. Including some “personality” occasionally (but not too much) can help establish a human connection.



SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATIONS

Twitter (www.Twitter.com) is designed to be a rapid-fire exchange of thoughts and ideas. Therefore, it is limited to 140-character posts. These short bursts of information are called “tweets.” Users can include links to images and other content and enter “hashtags” using the “#” sign as a way of categorizing messages and taking part in conversations (for example: #foodbiotech or #sustainable). The media in particular use Twitter to broadcast breaking news. If you like another user’s tweet, you can “re-tweet” that information. If others re-tweet your information, their followers may decide to follow you. This is how you build a base of followers.

When you create a Twitter account, one of the first things you will do is choose a Twitter username, widely referred to as a “handle.” All Twitter handles begin with the “@” sign. If you want to talk to someone on Twitter, use his or her handle in your tweet. For example: “@JoeSmith You might be interested in this blog post on #food #biotechnology (link)”

Facebook (www.Facebook.com). On Facebook, individuals and organizations can set up pages where they can post information, questions, fun facts, videos, and photos in their

“Status Update” to communicate with their “friends” or “fans.” Individuals “friend” each other and “like” organization pages.

Pinterest (www.Pinterest.com) is a pinboard-style photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based collections such as events, places or things, interests, recipes, and more. Pinterest’s mission is to “connect everyone in the world through the ‘things’ they find interesting.” Users can browse others’ pinboards for inspiration, “re-pin” images to their own collections, and “like” photos. You can create “boards” based on topics of interest, such as “food biotechnology,” for example. You can share videos and links to anything on the web, including blog posts, as long as there is an image included.

Blogs A blog is a series of regular entries or “posts” published on the web in reverse chronological order by an individual or group. Bloggers who are successful in gaining a following have one or more themes that they regularly post about, and their posts are unique, personal, and interesting to read. You may have your own personal blog or you may be asked to contribute to your organization’s blog.

Blog posts can be any length, but keep in mind that people are busy and shorter posts take less time to read. You can write more succinctly or break up a topic into a “series” of shorter posts. In general, 500-700 words is an ideal length and gives you enough room to make your key points, provide valuable tips to the reader, and link to additional information.

A Note About Personal Webpages: Many people also use their blog as their website, with additional pages for “About Me,” “Contact,” etc.

There are free sites that allow you to create your own blog/website (www.wordpress.com). Or, you can still opt to purchase your own web address (or domain name) and have a website designed to include a blog.

Ideas for Using Social Media

- Connect with media, colleagues, and influencers of interest to you.
- Build relationships with connections by communicating often and sharing useful information.
- You can use all of the social media platforms to share blog posts and links to research articles, photos, or anything else on the web that helps identify you as a credible expert. The more you talk about food biotechnology and reference the compelling body of research, the more comfortable people will be with the concept.
- Talk about what you are doing, such as attending events and conferences. Find what the “hashtag” for the event is and use it.
- To access content of interest to you, follow people and hashtags on Twitter, and subscribe to blogs.
- Host/participate in “chats” on Twitter or Facebook to “meet” new people and share your expertise.
- Write articles or commentaries on food biotechnology or modern agriculture. Include links and images, as well as personal anecdotes, such as a recent experience on a farm, to establish a connection with the reader.
- Read other blogs and comment on them—don’t forget to compliment and share balanced information. Do more than just correct; encourage those who are doing a good job, so they will keep doing it!

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

One of the most important facts to keep in mind about building media relationships is that no single set of prescribed steps can guarantee press coverage. Often coverage, or lack of it, is decided by what you have or have not done to establish relationships with media professionals long before you approach them with a breaking story.

Your relationships with the media should be partnerships. You want to reach the public—and the media provide access to the public. Likewise, the media want to capture the public's attention—and you have important information that can help them do that.

The following are tips to help you establish and maintain relations with the media. Keep in mind, however, that the procedures of your organization must take precedence, so be sure to familiarize yourself thoroughly with the policies of your public or media relations office and their preferred methods of media outreach.

- **Identify one relevant news contact at each organization:** Just as you are a local resource on food biotechnology, you will need a consistent contact you can call with a story idea or response to a food/agricultural biotechnology story (e.g., a reporter who regularly covers food, health, or consumer stories). The reporter covering a particular beat at a media outlet can change regularly, so be prepared to continually foster these relationships.
- **Build relationships:** Take advantage of opportunities to nurture positive relations with the media. Periodically send them new information or items of interest to remind them that you are a good resource for food biotechnology.
- **Stay in touch:** Compliment the media when they publish an accurate, thorough story about a priority issue for you. If a reporter has quoted you or your organization, send a note of appreciation for a job well done.
- **Be consistent:** Develop key message points so that anyone in your organization in contact with the media can deliver consistent messages about the importance of food biotechnology. Designate one person as your organization's spokesperson to provide a familiar presence with the media.
- **Offer other contacts:** Further demonstrate your value as a media resource by recommending other good contacts from organizations that add value to the food biotechnology issue and complement your area of expertise.
- **Give the media a heads up:** Reporters appreciate having tips to develop their stories, but they need advance notice in order to do so. When you know of an anticipated announcement or event, give the media a “heads up” so they have adequate time to cover your story. When appropriate, use embargo ground rules during conference calls and webcasts. On news releases, indicate “embargoed until [date], [time]” at the top of the page to let reporters know that the information cannot be officially released to the public until then. In any case, be selective and careful with what you release early.

Build Relationships with the Media

- Identify one relevant news contact at each organization
- Build relationships
- Stay in touch
- Be consistent
- Offer other contacts
- Give the media a heads up
- Help reporters do their job
- Be proactive
- Do your homework
- Become indispensable

- **Help reporters do their job:**

Remember that, to a degree, reporters rely on food experts like you for story ideas, timely information, and access to interview subjects—usually under tight deadlines. One of the best ways to establish productive relationships, therefore, is to help reporters accomplish their objectives. If you are prepared and can make a reporter's life easier, you will be remembered as a helpful and thorough source for food biotechnology stories.

- **Be proactive:** Provide background information before the interview. Most reporters appreciate receiving brief bullet points that they can quickly turn into interview questions.

- **Do your homework:** Before pitching a story, research the reporter's previous stories on the topic to avoid pitching something that is too similar. You will also be able to determine the journalist's specific position on the issue.

- **Become indispensable:** When reporters recognize you as a valuable source for food biotechnology stories, they are more likely to pay attention to your suggestions. One way to become indispensable is to introduce yourself as an expert—or someone with access to experts—on food biotechnology. For example, compile the most compelling biotechnology statistics and research and send them along to reporters with an introductory note. Another way is to keep a list of informed speakers and commonly requested facts on hand that can be provided quickly.

- Be prepared to repeat it all over again as new reporters come onto the job.



DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA

DO'S:

- **Be brief:** News stories require concise messages that can easily be converted into “sound bites” and short quotes.
- **Be relatable:** Humility and responsibility are attractive qualities, as is the ability to relate to a media outlet's readers or viewers. Admitting when you've made a mistake will help build trust.
- **Be responsive:** Realize that all media operate within tight deadlines. Respond quickly to requests for information or interviews. If possible, respond within the hour. The media's ability to reach you is critical to establishing yourself as a reliable, valuable media source.
- **Be honest:** If you don't know an answer, say so and offer to find out. If you can't find out, say so.
- **Be prepared:** Be prepared to provide information and to answer questions once you have a reporter's interest.

DON'TS:

- **Don't go it alone:** use the network to spread the access to expertise and different angles but prepare well first. Network colleagues don't like surprises and would appreciate a heads up on stories you are working on with the media.
- **Don't offer stale news:** Stay away from flimsy story ideas and issues that are yesterday's news.
- **Don't say something you would not want to see on the Internet or YouTube:** Assume nothing is “off the record”—even when chatting conversationally before or after answering specific questions on the topic.
- **Don't take “no” as the only answer:** If a journalist rejects a story idea, take the opportunity to ask him/her what type of information he/she would be able to use in a story.
- **Don't promise unless you really can deliver** on an interview or on an exclusive news story.

DIFFERENCES IN NEWS MEDIA

When targeting media for a story, keep in mind that each outlet has its own format and audience, and a story might not be appealing to every target audience. The following offers a break-down on formats, roles and standard deadlines by type of media.

Broadcast Media

- Television
- Radio

Print and Online Newspapers/ Magazines

- Newspapers (national, regional, local)
- Magazines and Newsletters (leisure, educational, professional)

Broadcast Media

TELEVISION

Television is a highly visual medium that requires producing images that will make the story more interesting or easier to understand. Depending on the type of story, you have the following options for coverage:

- Local and national news segments
- Network and cable talk shows and discussion programs
- Paid segments with interviews
- Public service announcements (10-, 30-, or 60-second spots)

When looking to get a story on television, it helps to know the:

- Program producer/researcher, who controls the story lineup for each newscast (e.g., he/she may see food biotechnology news as a “peg” on which to hang a series of segments on nutrition and health).
- News assignment editor, who is the day-to-day decision maker on which stories get covered and



which do not. You can also go directly to the appropriate reporter, who will decide whether to present the story to the assignment editor if he or she is interested.

- Regular local news anchors, who are increasingly developing and driving news stories.

When working with television journalists, keep the following tips in mind:

- Video news releases, B-roll, and other graphics are often used by TV producers to help viewers better understand information provided in the segment. If you have these, always offer them to the producers.
- Television news is brief, often reducing issues to 30-second segments using short “sound bites.” If you arrange for an on-camera interview, remember that brief is best. (Interviews taped beforehand are often reduced to one or two short sound bites embedded within the segment. Live on-air interviews are usually kept to three minutes or less.)
- Television is a visual medium. Whenever possible, supply a visual to add interest and appeal to your interview.

Deadline: ASAP for breaking news; usually by 10 a.m. to make the 6 p.m. news. Public service announcements usually require two to four weeks to get onto a radio/TV rotation cycle. Talk shows have a lead time ranging from one or two weeks to as long as two months.

RADIO

Radio's format requires a constant but varied stream of news and information. This presents many opportunities to have your message aired, including:

- News
- Listener call-in programs
- Morning and afternoon “drive-time” radio shows
- Public service announcements (10-, 30-, or 60-second announcements)

When looking to get a story on radio, it helps to know the:

- News director, who is the senior gatekeeper and also is often the senior news editor.
- Program director, who will direct you to a talk show contact or host if your story seems appropriate.
- Assignment editor, who generates story ideas, often with talk show producers or the news director; finds angles and features to add variety to news casts.
- Reporter, who covers stories on location.

As you think of ways to approach radio stations with ideas, keep the following tips in mind:

- Drive times (6 to 9 a.m. and 3 to 6 p.m.) are good for targeting coverage.

- For taped radio interviews, as with television, you must be able to speak in short (10- to 15-second) “sound bites.” And, because radio provides only one dimension of the interviewee—his or her voice—tone, firmness, and lack of hesitancy in responding to questions all contribute to the credibility of the message.
- Make sure the interview—whether by telephone or in person—is conducted without audible distractions (such as papers being shuffled, office mates talking, or cell phone static or background noise) to ensure good sound quality.

Deadline: Depends on the story, but “day of” is usually acceptable for breaking news; give notice of public events several days in advance. Talk shows, like television, have a lead time ranging from one to two weeks, occasionally longer.



Print and Online Newspapers/Magazines

Newspapers and magazines, both print and online, may provide more in-depth coverage of a subject, although interviews may still be heavily edited. Increasingly, community news is seen as a necessity to maintain balance in news coverage, which improves your chances of getting your information in print. Newspapers and magazines need your news. Opportunities for food biotechnology coverage include:

- Food/nutrition news and features
- Science news and features
- Agricultural news
- Metro/city news
- Consumer news
- Letters to the editor
- Op-ed pieces

When looking to get a story into a newspaper or magazine, it helps to know the:

- City/metro desk editor, who handles local stories in the community and is probably your first contact for events.
- Reporters who receive assignments from the editors and cover a specific “beat” (such as community events, nutrition and health, food, science, and medical issues), will write your story, and may ask for interviews.
- Photo desk editor, who may want to attend events that offer compelling visuals and are good photo opportunities.

Keep the following tips in mind:

- Offer simple graphics and suggest photo opportunities that will help explain or add depth to your story.
- Find out exactly what graphics your contact needs and offer easy access.

Deadline: Deadlines for newspapers and magazines vary; however, the life cycle of newspapers moves very quickly. The deadline for a newspaper might be a couple hours to a couple of weeks. Magazines have a longer lead time; usually around six months.

DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

Your information, regardless of how timely or interesting, will go nowhere if it is never read or seen by anyone. Unfortunately, the preferred means of contact (e.g., email, phone, etc.) varies from outlet to outlet and reporter to reporter. However, identifying individual preferences is a very simple and appreciated process.

A logical way to tackle this question when contacting a large number of media outlets is to pick one means of distribution, distribute the information, and then in your follow-up call, ask the reporter if he or she received the information and if he or she prefers being contacted another way. Note the preference, and you will be prepared and organized for the next time.

As with every other aspect of media relations, building relationships is key. As you work with media in your area and make note of each contact, you will establish personal relationships that will make you better able to anticipate their needs.



Improving Public Understanding: Guidelines for Communicating Emerging Science on Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health

FOR JOURNALISTS, SCIENTISTS AND ALL OTHER COMMUNICATORS

Based on an advisory group convened by Harvard School of Public Health and IFIC Foundation.

First published by Oxford University Press in Journal of the National Cancer Institute (February 4, 1998, Volume 90, Number 3). Please use the original citation when reprinting part, or all, of this document.

See also: "Getting the Story Straight on Nutrition," The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), February 11, 1998.

Twenty-five years ago, a food and health study would never have made the evening news. Now, hardly a day goes by that a breaking story on the foods we eat doesn't make headlines.

"These Guidelines can only make a difference if they don't sit on a shelf. Putting these recommendations into practice just might make a difference in the public's understanding of diet and health. I urge you to read them, share them, remember them and use them. After all, I think what the public wants is for us to be honest with each study as it comes along and try to put it into perspective, but keep reminding people that it's the totality of evidence as it unfolds that warrants their attention."

Timothy Johnson, MD, MPH,
Medical Editor, ABC Good Morning
America

The public has taken an avid interest in their food, and due to its personal and emotional nature, food stories make for compelling news.

However, the reality is that emerging science can be confusing. According to the IFIC Foundation 2012 *Food & Health Survey*, three out of four consumers (76%) feel that changes in nutritional guidance make it hard to know what to believe. The way emerging science is communicated and by whom can have a powerful effect on the public's understanding, behavior, and well-being.

To examine these issues and assist in the communications process, in 1998 the Harvard School of Public Health and the IFIC Foundation convened an advisory group of leading experts for a series of eight roundtables around the country, involving more than 60 other nutrition researchers, food scientists, journal editors, university press officers, broadcast and print reporters, consumer groups, and food industry executives.

Based on the group's input, a set of guiding principles for communicating emerging science was developed. At the heart of these principles is the belief that food-related science can be effectively communicated in a way that facilitates public understanding.

The guidelines are designed to help ensure that sound science and improved public understanding ultimately guide what and how we communicate and to help communicators add context to new studies by asking questions that will help them put studies into context and identify the most important takeaways that will best inform the public.



GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL PARTIES IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

1. Will your communication enhance public understanding of diet and health?

Is the study credible enough to warrant public attention?

With the information you provided, will the public be able to properly assess the importance of the findings and whether they should have any immediate bearing on their food choices?

Have you avoided an overly simplistic approach that may inappropriately characterize individual foods ingredients or supplements as good or bad? Have you helped the public understand how the food, ingredient, or supplement can be consumed as part of a total healthful diet, or why it should not be consumed?

Have you appropriately represented the study's overall conclusions and avoided highlighting selective findings that, on their own, might present a misleading picture?

2. Have you put the study findings into context?

If the findings are preliminary and inconclusive, have you made that clear?

If the findings differ with previous studies, have you indicated this and explained why? If the results refute previously released results, do you provide a weight of evidence comparable with the earlier findings?

Have you clarified to whom the findings apply? Have you avoided generalizing the effects when the study was restricted to populations of a certain age or sex or with specific genetic, environmental, or other predisposing conditions?

Have you included information about risk/benefit trade-offs of consuming or not consuming certain foods, ingredients, or supplements? Have you explained how these risks and benefits compare with other factors (e.g., level of physical activity, genetic history) that may also contribute to health?

In explaining a dietary risk, have you distinguished between population wide estimates and individual risk? Have you cited statistics on absolute risk and not just relative risk, e.g., expressing an increase in incidence from "one in a million to three in a million" and not just as "three times the risk"?

3. Has the study or findings been peer reviewed?

Has the study been peer reviewed by independent scientists or published in a peer-reviewed journal? At the same time, have you understood that although peer review is an important

standard, it does not guarantee the findings are definitive or conclusive?

If a study has not been peer reviewed (e.g., a paper presented at a meeting or convention), are the findings so important that they should be communicated to the public before peer review?

Have you distinguished between actual study findings and editorials or commentaries that may have been written about the study? Have you clarified that an editorial is an expression of personal views and has not always been peer reviewed? Have you investigated how widely held these views are or whether the editorial represents a narrowly held opinion?

4. Have you disclosed the important facts about the study?

Have you provided adequate information on the study's original purpose, research design, and methods of data collection and analysis?

Have you acknowledged any limitations or shortcomings the study may have?

5. Have you disclosed all key information about the study's funding?

Have you publicly disclosed all funding sources for the study?

Are you reasonably confident of the study's objectivity and independence?

Have you considered what the funders stand to gain or lose from the study's outcome?

Have you allowed the validity of the science to speak for itself, regardless of the funding?

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR SCIENTISTS

1. Have you provided essential background information about the study in your written findings, or to journalists or others requesting it, in a language that can be understood?

Have you explained all details of the study, including purpose, hypothesis, type and number of subjects, research design, methods of data collection, and analysis and the primary findings?

Are you reporting study findings consistent with the original purpose of the data collection?

Were appropriate scientific methods of inquiry used? Did you disclose any study shortcomings or limitations, including methods of data collection? Were objective health measurements used to help verify self-reports?

Was the study conducted in animals or humans? Are limitations of animal models in their applicability to humans noted?

Have you waited to report the results until the study has been independently peer reviewed? If not, did you disclose to the media that the findings are preliminary and have not yet been peer reviewed?

2. Have you clarified dietary risks and benefits?

Did you explain the dosage of a substance or the amount of food or ingredient that was linked to the health outcome? Is this amount reasonably consumed by the average individual?

What was the original risk of developing the disease? Have you expressed the new level of risk as both absolute and relative risk?

3. Have you met the needs of the media?

Are you available for media interviews the day before or after the release?

Do you make every attempt to respond to media inquiries promptly?

Does the news release prepared for the study communicate the primary findings faithfully and without exaggeration? Have you reviewed and approved the final version of your institution's news release?

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR JOURNAL EDITORS

1. Does your embargo policy enhance public communication?

Do you make embargoed copies of the journal available to all journalists who agree to respect the embargo, not just a select group of reporters?

Do you notify scientists whose studies will likely receive press attention when the embargoed issue is being made available?

Do you provide the relevant articles from the embargoed journal to study authors so they can preview other related work in that issue, helping them respond to questions?

2. Do you encourage responsible media reporting on study findings?

If you issue a news release on an article in your journal, is it faithful to the underlying research? Does it provide adequate background information?

3. Have you considered the effect of the study findings on consumers?

Have you considered what might be the effect of the study findings on the general public?

Does the study warrant an accompanying editorial to help put the findings into context? If so, is the editorial content included in the news release?

4. Does your submission policy permit scientists to clarify results of abstract presentations with the media?

Does your submission policy make it clear that scientists presenting abstracts should submit the complete report for peer review? Have you stressed they should not distribute copies of the complete report of the study, or figures or tables from that study, to the media before publication in a peer-reviewed journal?

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR JOURNALISTS

1. Is your story accurate and balanced?

Have you established the credibility of your primary source?

Have you asked other reputable scientists and other third-party health sources if they believe the study is reliable and significant? Have these scientists reviewed the study?

Do the third-party sources you are quoting represent mainstream scientific thinking on the issue involved? If not, have you make it clear that such opinions or commentary differ from most scientific perspectives on this topic? If only one or two individuals express such opposing viewpoint, does the amount of coverage given reflect that these are clearly minority opinions?

Have you received and reviewed a copy of the study publication—not simply reviewed abstracts, news releases, wire reports, or other secondary sources of information?

After reviewing the study results and limitations, have you concluded it still warrants coverage? Have you objectively considered the possibility of not covering the study?

Are words that are used to describe the findings appropriate for the type of investigation? Cause and effect can be shown directly only in studies in which the intervention is the only variable modified between the experimental and control group.

Is the tone of the news report appropriate? Do you avoid using words that overstate the findings, e.g., “may” does not mean “will” and “some” people does not mean “all” or “most” people?

Are the headlines, photo images, and graphics consistent with the findings and content of your article?

2. Have you applied a healthy skepticism to your reporting?

In talking to sources and reading news releases, have you separated fact versus emotion or commentary?

Do the study findings seem plausible?

Have you used any hyped or “loaded” terms in the headline or body of a report to attract public attention, e.g., “scientific breakthrough” or “medical miracle”? Does the report indirectly suggest that a pill, treatment, or other approach is a “silver bullet”?

Have you applied the same critical standards to all sources of information—from scientists, to public relations and press offices, to journals, to industry, to consumer and special interest groups? What does the information source have to gain if its point of view is presented? Have you considered a range of conflict-of-interest possibilities beyond dollars?

3. Does your story provide practical consumer advice?

Have you translated the findings into everyday consumer advice? For example, if a study reports on the effects of a nutrient, have you considered identifying the foods in which it is most commonly found?

How do action steps relate to the larger context of existing dietary guidance (e.g., Dietary Guidelines for Americans, USDA Food Guide Pyramid, importance of balance, variety and moderation)?

Have you provided credible national, state, or local resources from which consumers can obtain more information or assistance on the diet and health topic—especially if the findings present an immediate threat to public health and safety (e.g., foodborne or waterborne illness outbreak), such as brochures, toll-free hotlines, or online resources?

4. Is your reporting grounded in basic understanding of scientific principles?

Are you aware of the difference between evidence and opinion? If not, have you consulted knowledgeable sources?

Are you familiar with the scientific method of inquiry and various terms such as hypothesis testing, control groups, randomization, and double-blind study? Do you understand and communicate that the nature of science is evolutionary, not revolutionary?

Are you familiar with different types of studies, why they are used and the limitations of each?

Do you stay current on diet and health recommendations so that you can help identify the true significance of new findings?

GUIDELINES FOR INDUSTRY, CONSUMER, AND OTHER INTEREST GROUPS

1. Have you provided accurate information and feedback to the media?

Is your news release on the study in keeping with the findings, i.e., neither exaggerates or oversimplifies nor disregards or sensationalizes the findings? Does it provide new insight or help enhance public understanding of the study results?

Do you tactfully correct misinformation in the media? Do you provide scientific explanations of why the story is incorrect, not simply express opinions or judgements of a few individuals? Do you follow up with journalists to acknowledge an accurate, insightful story?

2. Do you adhere to ethical standards in providing diet and health information?

Do you respect the embargo placed on a study, rather than attempt to scoop or “be first with” the news?

Have you avoided promoting or writing news releases on studies that have not been peer reviewed? Have you acknowledged that results that have not been scientifically reviewed are preliminary findings and do not call for a change in behavior?

Have you identified your organization's viewpoint and sources of funding?