

# Mis- and Disinformation

## Understanding the Problem

This brief provides guidance for RDN/NDTRs navigating the growing challenges of nutrition and disinformation. In alignment with the Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession (Code of Ethics), the strategies outlined here support responsible evidence-based practice, enhance public trust, and uphold the integrity of the profession. ([View the full Code of Ethics.](#))

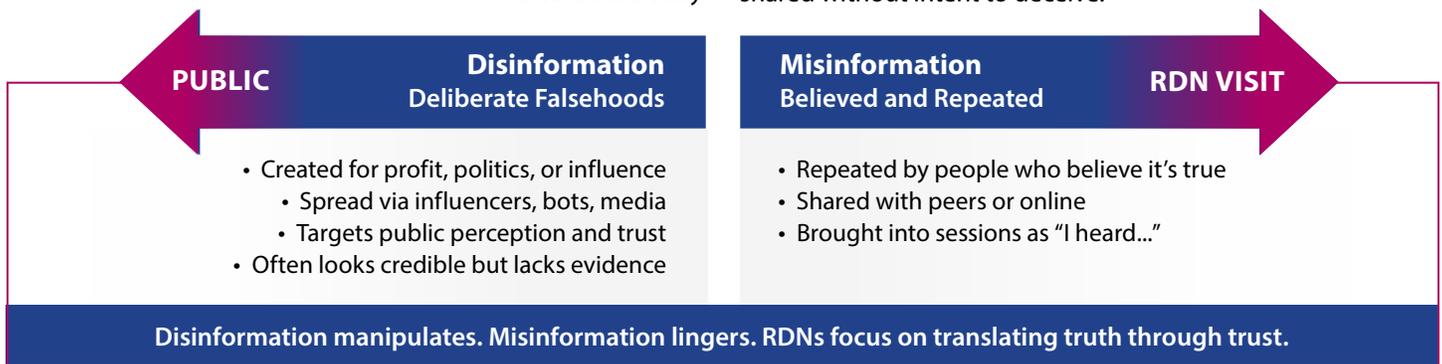
### Definitions

#### Disinformation

False or misleading information shared deliberately.

#### Misinformation

False or misleading information shared without intent to deceive.



### Understanding the Landscape

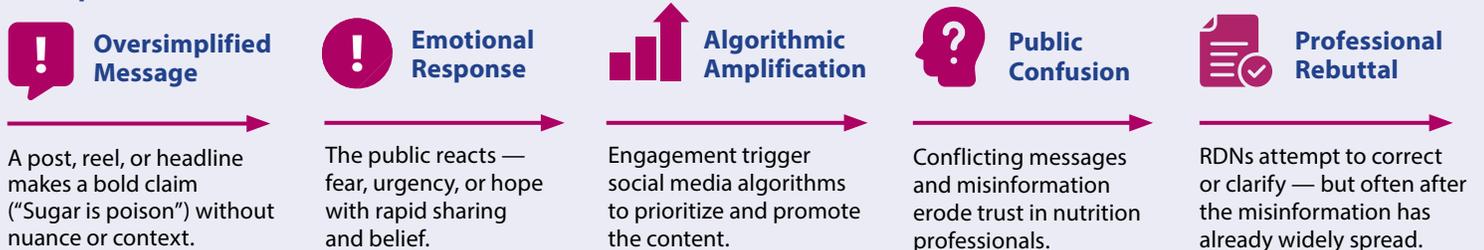
Both mis- and disinformation continue to impact public understanding of nutrition science. These forces contribute to confusion, erode trust in health professionals, and can negatively influence health outcomes. Misinformation is not simply a communication issue. It intersects with clinical decision-making, public education, health equity, and professional credibility. Regardless of role or practice setting, RDNs/NDTRs must be equipped to engage with misinformation ethically, effectively, and with empathy.

### Contributing Factors

Several dynamics contribute to the spread and persistence of misinformation:

- **Information volume:** Rapid sharing on digital platforms outpaces the ability to assess accuracy.
- **Appeal of oversimplification:** Misinformation often appears more accessible or emotionally satisfying than nuanced, evidence-informed recommendations.
- **Structural barriers:** Many RDN/NDTRs lack adequate time for access to training in research appraisal and science communication.
- **Erosion of institutional trust:** Some audiences express skepticism toward mainstream health institutions, increasing receptivity to alternate narratives.

### Example:



## Practice Recommendations

### 1. Establish Trust through Empathy

Engage others with compassion and a willingness to understand their concerns and values. Avoid framing responses as corrections or debates. Listen for emotion behind the mis/disinformation to focus on the values behind the information — the purpose is to develop personal connection.

#### Possible Language:

- “I can see why this might feel confusing. What’s been most challenging or unclear about it for you?”
- “There’s a lot of information out there, and it can be hard to know what to trust. What have you heard so far, and what feels most important for us to clarify together?”

### 2. Respect Cultural and Traditional Practices

Avoid immediate dismissal of cultural remedies or beliefs. Instead, explore them with openness and a shared interest in safety and efficacy. Use motivational interviewing skills to facilitate evidence-informed care that is grounded in the patient’s lived experiences.

#### Possible Language:

- “Can you tell me more about how this practice is used in your community?”
- “How has this approach worked for you in the past?”

### 3. Uphold Scientific Integrity

Ensure that guidance is grounded in the best available evidence, and clearly distinguish between knowns, unknowns, and areas of emerging research. As required in the **Code of Ethics**, the RDN/NDTR must separate personal biases and monetary influences from nutrition care.

#### Best Practices:

- Emphasize that a single study does not establish consensus.
- Reference systematic reviews and guidelines where applicable.

### 4. Maintain Professional Boundaries and Stay centered within the Code of Ethics

Recognize when a topic exceeds your scope or available evidence and refer appropriately.

#### Best Practices:

- Saying “I don’t know” is consistent with **ethical practice** and professional credibility.
- Acknowledge uncertainty transparently and without defensiveness.

## Organizational Support & Systems-Level Solutions

To reduce the burden on individual practitioners, institutions and professional organizations should:

- Develop shared, accessible **toolkits** that include vetted resources, messaging guidance, and example scenarios.
- Create opportunities for **peer learning and reflection** — including case-based discussions and debriefs.
- Support **continuing education** that addresses misinformation, media, digital, and research literacy, and trust-building communication.

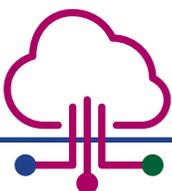
## Conclusion

Misinformation and disinformation are persistent and evolving challenges, but we are uniquely positioned to respond with **clarity, transparency, and empathy**. We do not need to know everything, nor must we confront every false claim. What we do need is a shared commitment to:

- Foster empathy and listening first
- Communicate responsibly
- Practice with integrity
- Stay grounded in evidence
- Hold space for uncertainty

Together, we can strengthen public trust, support informed decision-making, and fulfill our ethical responsibilities in an increasingly complex information environment.

For more information, visit the Academy’s Nutrition Fact Check.



This is part of a series of briefs from the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Council on Future Practice** describing change drivers that will affect the future of the profession. This brief is intended to familiarize readers with this specific change driver and its implications, so that readers can share this knowledge with their organizations. Learn more about environmental scanning for change drivers and trends [here](#).