



## **Media Literacy and Women's Health**

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### ***Why is media literacy so important now?***

In an era dominated by so many mass media messages characterized by misleading hype rather than well-documented facts, it is crucial to be able to assess the quality of what we are reading or seeing.

Though not easy, here are a few points to remember:

- Never use ads as your main source of information
- Find out, when possible, the source of your information, so you can be aware of potential conflicts of interest. Remember that half of everything reported in the news today originates from a PR firm, and that there are now more PR practitioners than newspaper reporters and journalists.
- The media's primary source of income is the over 100 billion dollars/per year spent on advertising, and often there is a reluctance to "bite the hand that feeds you." Thus, a corporation providing lots of advertising revenue for a magazine might never be criticized in that magazine. (This has been true of most women's magazines vis-à-vis the tobacco industry.)
- There has been a proliferation of phony grassroots organizations or "astro-turf" groups that look and sound like public interest citizens' groups. They are, however, groups created for corporate clients that seek to establish the impression that there is public support for their corporate agenda, usually aimed at maximizing profits rather than the public good. (Sometimes, of course, these two CAN coincide!) See [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org) for examples.

- Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (or “DTCA”) of prescription drugs is a relatively new phenomenon that has grown phenomenally since the late 1990s. More than 4.2 billion dollars was spent on such ads in 2005 alone. Many of the prescription drugs advertised have serious problems and side effects that do not make it into the ads, and more people are taking such drugs inappropriately, often with harmful and avoidable consequences. See our website for more information and links.

For a brief guide on how to use the Internet to get good-quality information, see our website:

[www.ourbodiesourselves.org](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org). Also, sign up for our regular blog, Our Bodies, Our Blog

(see [www.ourbodiesourblog.org](http://www.ourbodiesourblog.org)). We also link to other websites that provide high quality

information not distorted by commercial interests or conflicts of interest. Stay as well-informed as you can.

Evidence-based books by Our Bodies Ourselves, all published by Simon & Schuster, include:

*Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century (2005)*

*Our Bodies, Ourselves: Menopause (2006)*

*Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth (2008)*

