# Health misinformation super-spreaders on social media put millions at risk with carnivore and keto diet fads



The rise of social media has transformed the landscape of health and nutrition, bringing with it both accessibility and significant risks. Recent analysis highlights a concerning trend: influencers promoting carnivore and ketogenic diets, along with raw milk consumption, are disseminating dangerous misinformation that poses health risks to millions. This phenomenon, classified by researchers as a group of ‘super-spreaders’, not only misguides followers but also serves their financial interests.

According to an investigation by the Rooted Research Collective and the Freedom Food Alliance, a staggering 87% of these influencers lack medical qualifications, with 59% possessing no health credentials whatsoever. Despite this, many present themselves as authorities, misleading followers into believing in their expertise. Alice Millbank, co-founder and chief scientific officer at Rooted Research, captured the essence of this issue, stating, “Nutrition is complex, but it doesn’t have to be confusing. Superspreaders exploit that confusion by offering dangerously simple answers dressed up as hacks, often driven by profit, not science.”

The analysis identified three predominant categories of straying influencers. The first, dubbed ‘The Docs’, includes individuals who leverage their titles for credibility yet may not necessarily hold legitimate medical qualifications. These influencers often use fear-based messaging to promote distrust in established health guidelines and push controversial dietary choices. The second group, ‘The Rebels’, adopts an anti-establishment tone, frequently challenging conventional health wisdom and promoting raw milk and carnivore diets with emotionally charged narratives. Finally, ‘The Hustlers’ blend wellness marketing with personal success stories, creating a polished image that masks their profit-driven motives through sponsorships and misleading diet consultations.

The reach of these influencers is particularly noticeable among younger demographics; 57% of millennials and Gen Zers report being influenced by nutrition trends on TikTok, where only 2% of content aligns with established public health guidelines. Alarmingly, one in five Americans reportedly trust health influencers more than their local medical practitioners. This situation is exacerbated by the prevalence of unregulated supplements and extreme dietary advice, often marketed through visually appealing posts that prioritise dramatic results over safety.

Financial motives further complicate the picture. The analysis reveals that a staggering 96% of these ‘super-spreaders’ have clear financial incentives linked to the misinformation they promote. Many run businesses selling supplements or providing coaching, charging steep fees ranging from $100 to $250 per hour for consultations, with some offering costly biohacking programmes. The lure of potential earnings can overshadow the significant health risks associated with the advice given, leading followers down paths of dietary extremes that may result in adverse health effects.

To combat the tide of misinformation, experts suggest multi-faceted strategies aimed at strengthening public health. Advocates propose integrating nutrition and digital literacy into school curriculums to help young people identify and challenge misleading claims. Additionally, a revamp of public health messaging is essential; engaging with credible nutritional professionals on social media can help provide a counter-narrative to misleading trends. Dr Matthew Nagra, a Canadian naturopathic doctor, voiced concern over the influence of so-called medical professionals who propagate inaccurate information, warning that this can have profound implications on public health.

The intertwining of nutrition misinformation with broader societal themes, such as women’s rights, also emerges from the research. Many influencers perpetuate outdated gender roles alongside their dietary messaging, suggesting a deeper cultural impact tied to the dissemination of such misinformation. This underscores the necessity for comprehensive understanding and interventions that transcend simple fact-checking.

In a world where social media platforms offer a two-edged sword of information access, enhancing critical thinking skills and promoting engagement with reliable sources become paramount. Combating misinformation is as complex as nutrition itself; it requires widespread education, the promotion of evidence-based public health messages, and a collective societal response to challenges posed by health misinformation in the digital age.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: (1), (2), (3)
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10. Paragraph 10: (1), (5)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/social-media-health-misinformation-meat-carnivore-diet/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://rootedresearch.co/projects/nutrition-misinformation-project-announcement/> - Rooted Research Collective and the Freedom Food Alliance have partnered to address the spread of nutrition misinformation on social media platforms like Instagram. Their project aims to identify key 'super-spreaders' of false health information, analyze the impact of these misleading trends, and advocate for consumer awareness campaigns and regulatory measures to mitigate associated health risks. The initiative underscores the urgency of combating misinformation that can lead to adverse health outcomes, emphasizing the need for evidence-based public health messaging and digital literacy education.
3. <https://www.freedomfoodalliance.org/unfork-the-food-system/freedom-food-alliance-research-report-rooted-research> - The Freedom Food Alliance has collaborated with Rooted Research Collective to tackle the pervasive issue of dietary misinformation on social media. Their research highlights the alarming prevalence of misleading health advice, particularly regarding diets like the carnivore diet, which contradict established public health guidelines. The partnership aims to identify sources of misinformation, assess health impacts, and develop evidence-based campaigns to inform the public and promote healthier dietary choices, addressing the significant public health challenge posed by such misinformation.
4. <https://disa.org/the-dissemination-of-dietary-misinformation-on-social-media-platforms/> - Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become breeding grounds for diet misinformation, where unverified claims and dangerous trends proliferate, posing significant risks to public health. A recent study highlighted the alarming prevalence of nutrition myths online, particularly among younger audiences. These myths often come packaged in attractive formats, featuring dramatic before-and-after photos and promises of effortless weight loss. Influencers, frequently lacking formal training in nutrition or medicine, promote extreme diets and unregulated supplements, capitalizing on the desire for quick fixes.
5. <https://disa.org/countering-diet-culture-misinformation-on-social-media/> - In the digital age, social media has become an omnipresent force, shaping our perceptions and influencing our behaviors. While it offers numerous benefits, it also serves as a breeding ground for misinformation, particularly regarding health and diet. The proliferation of fad diets, often promoted by unqualified influencers, poses a significant threat to the well-being of impressionable users, especially young girls. These trends, masked as health journeys, often perpetuate harmful ideologies and unrealistic body standards, leading to a distorted view of healthy eating and potentially causing long-term psychological and physical harm.
6. <https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/nutrition-fitness/fact-checking-nutrition-influencers-8-red-flags-to-help-you-spot-nutrition-misinformation/> - The Mayo Clinic Press provides guidance on identifying nutrition misinformation by highlighting eight red flags to watch for when evaluating health advice from influencers. These include the absence of qualifications, promotion of extreme diets, and the use of sensational language. The article emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and consulting qualified health professionals to ensure the information consumed is accurate and reliable, helping individuals make informed decisions about their health and nutrition.
7. <https://www.carnegasm.com/guides/carnivore-nutritional-dogma/> - This article discusses the risks associated with blindly following carnivore diet influencers, emphasizing the potential health dangers of adopting extreme dietary restrictions without a well-rounded perspective. It highlights misleading nutritional claims that can lead to harmful health changes and cautions against making unverified changes to medications or health practices. The piece underscores the importance of critical evaluation and seeking balanced information from reputable sources to make informed dietary decisions.