

MAKING MEDIA INTERVIEWS MEANINGFUL

Health professionals are often asked to comment on new nutrition research or health trends in the media. Although the interview process can be daunting, guidance, preparation and the right techniques for interviews can help you feel more confident in sharing your expertise and nutrition information with the media. From participating in live interviews to providing expert comment, this handout will highlight your role in the media process, give expert advice for effective message delivery and provide tried and tested techniques to prepare for interviews.



RAISING YOUR MEDIA PROFILE

If you're new to health writing or media relations, you may be wondering how to raise your profile and get noticed by journalists so that you can become a go-to expert for media interviews.

1. If you haven't already, get going on social media. This can really help journalists and companies to spot your content and keep you in mind for expert comment. Check out our [How-to Guide for Excellent \(and Evidence-Based!\) Tweets, Posts and Videos](#)
2. Seize opportunities to raise your public profile and promote your expertise, whether that's speaking at events, writing blogs or guest posts for other nutrition professionals
3. If you're a Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist, you may be able to provide expert comment on behalf of your association – get in touch with them to find out how!

THE ROLE OF THE NUTRITION EXPERT

INTERVIEW TIPS

Health professionals can provide expert scientific knowledge that is trustworthy and balanced. The journalist seeks out your expertise to make sense of current research, comment on a trend or medical condition, or provide practical advice about what to eat or avoid – all areas that they cannot reliably improvise. The advice or “tip giving” moment of your interview may be the area that listeners or readers hone in on because it has relevance for them. This advice may be conveyed best with an anecdote.



WHAT DO JOURNALISTS WANT

- Extremes: firsts, biggest, best, top
- Trends and new research
- Human stories
- Expert comment
- Immediacy

WHAT DO JOURNALISTS DO FOR PREPARATION

- They research their story angle
- They research you, from Google, your website and even your social media

PREPARATION: WHAT TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER OR JOURNALIST AHEAD OF TIME

- The questions they will ask
- The areas that they want to cover (if specific questions are not provided)
- The length of interview
- The format of interview:
live, pre-recorded, discussion, studio, telephone, questions from callers (radio)
- Who else will be interviewed for the story; will there be a panel discussion?

MEANINGFUL MESSAGE CONTENT

In order to deliver effective messages within an interview, consider these points:

Use statements that are non-generic and are supported with statistics

Example: In an interview about fruit and veg consumption, you might want to cite survey data on the population intake.

Provide colour with human stories and anecdotes

(think about how memorable anecdotes are in your life)

Be practical, not patronising, and remember to keep the information top line

Provide information that busts common myths

Explain research caveats and uncertainty in a matter of fact, transparent way

Example 1: “We do not know the full implications of this study, but this finding is certainly another piece of the puzzle in understanding blood pressure.”

Example 2: “This [new study](#)¹ tells us about almonds and their potential for reducing wrinkles, but it’s important to note that these findings only relate to post-menopausal women at the moment. More research in this area is needed before we can draw wider conclusions.”

TIPS FOR SMOOTH, EVIDENCE-BASED DELIVERY

For your messages to cut through the clutter, you can utilise these techniques to deliver messages in an easily digestible format.

Prepare to adapt the length of your answers

Aim for 20 seconds for short answers and 40 seconds for more involved replies, but be careful not to come across like you’re rushing

Practice your answers and record yourself

Watching or listening to your answers back can help you to identify areas where you need to improve

- Do you skirt around the point? Try writing the answer out and ruthlessly cutting out words. This can help you to find the most concise way of describing something
- Are you speaking quicker than normal? If you’re in the habit of talking too quickly, try to slow your answers down to what feels just on the edge of uncomfortably slow and listen to it back
- Do you forget to pause? If you find you’re not stopping to take a breath or use too many filler words such as ‘like’ or ‘umm’ try to use natural pauses to take a breath and slow it down. The end of a sentence signifies a pause, take it

Rule of three - deliver answers in three parts

It’s what people listen for and it helps you to structure what you’re going to say

TIPS FOR SMOOTH, EVIDENCE-BASED DELIVERY

Don't worry about what you leave out

Only you will know what you might have forgotten to mention

Bridge to practical messages

Take a new or complex finding and turn it into advice about which foods to choose and how much to eat

Example: "This new [study](#) from Harvard tells us eating nuts multiple times per week will help us prevent long-term weight gain. Simply put, this means that people who eat nuts like almonds will gain fewer pounds as they age – commonly called middle-age spread -- compared to people who eat fewer nuts. Practically speaking, a portion of almonds is a handful or about 23 almonds, and can be part of your weekly diet – whether as a mid-morning snack or tossed into a leafy green salad for added crunch and nutrients."

Don't get drawn into controversial questions

Journalists will often try to probe into provocative or polarising topics, but don't feel pressured to answer questions that you're not qualified or happy to talk about. Do not repeat their question and bridge to your facts or commentary

Example: "Although you raise an interesting perspective, I'm here today, as a qualified registered dietitian, to talk about nutrition and what we do know is ... [segue to your point]."

Buy yourself time when needed

Start with what you know in a general way and then dive into the tricky point

Do not feel the need to fill the silence after an interviewer asks a question. Say what you intended to say and stop. It's the journalist's job to ask the next question. People can get into trouble saying something they did not intend or describing topics outside of their remit when they think they need to keep talking. This is a classic reporter technique in "gotcha" journalism to catch someone out

Use the classic technique of saying, "If you can just remember one thing about this, it is..."

This verbal cue signals to the reader or listener to pay attention to one critical point that you want to convey



BRIDGING TECHNIQUES

The reporter may have their own agenda for the interview and want a splashier or attention-grabbing headline. Online media success is often judged by how many people click on a story to read. With this in mind, you need to make your point clear even if you don't get asked the question you want to answer. You can bridge to the response you want to give.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW

Reporter: *So, we are hearing a lot about almonds these days as good for your heart. Aren't they full of fat?*

Nutrition Expert: *Yes, they do contain fat, but it is the healthy kind called unsaturated fat.*

Reporter: *Fat does equal calories, doesn't it? Aren't you supposed to be watching your weight if you want a healthy heart?*

Nutrition Expert: *There a lot of things we can do to protect our hearts such as exercise, smoking secession and eating a healthy diet, which means including healthy unsaturated fats found in olive oils, nuts like almonds and avocados. Research also shows that almonds don't actually provide as many calories as we originally thought as the fat is not all available for absorption by our bodies².*

Reporter: *How do we know that research can be trusted? We get a new study every day and now butter is good for us.*

Nutrition Expert: *Nutrition research studies all need to be reviewed carefully and health professionals are well trained to interpret results accurately to communicate helpful nutrition messages, but what I want people to understand right now is that eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, healthy fats and fibre will pay dividends.*

REFERENCES

1. Foolad N, Vaughn AR, Rybak I, Burney WA, Chodur GM, Newman JW, Steinberg FM, Sivamani RK. Prospective randomized controlled pilot study on the effects of almond consumption on skin lipids and wrinkles. *Phytotherapy Research*. 2019;1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ptr.6495>
2. Novotny JA, Gebauer SK, Baer DJ. Discrepancy between the Atwater factor predicted and empirically measured energy values of almonds in human diets. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2012;96(2):296-301