

Snake oil or genius?



By [Marion Scher](#)

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I recently spoke to the Association of Dietetics South Africa on dealing with the media - a hot topic for them these days with all the controversy around Banting and the LCHF diet... And of course, dare I say it, Professor Tim Noakes...

Here was a group of a couple of hundred highly qualified dietitians and nutritionists who almost felt helpless against the tirade of media pushing Noakes and his 'miracle diet'.

After all, when you normally think 'diet' you think of cutting out food you normally crave and love, such as cold drinks, chocolates and, worst of all, booze. I say this as I'm writing for this particular website and its readers (advertising, public relations, media) - say no more...

Panting for Banting

As has been recorded in various media there are many opinions around Noakes and his LCHF philosophy, both positive and negative. The point is Noakes is a brilliant salesman and people that have religiously followed his new food philosophy have lost weight. So have those in the past who've gone on fad diets such as the cabbage soup diet, grapefruit diet, raw food diet and so on.

What makes this particular eating plan different is the fact that you're encouraged to eat food high in fat content, which gives cardiologists the tremors even thinking of it. Universities have put out research disproving many of his theories. The medical profession has labelled it 'criminal' and 'sinister', yet still the public demand for this type of food is growing daily, to the point where major supermarkets are selling LCHF products and restaurants are advertising Banting menus.

So what is it that has literally brainwashed people into converting to this LCHF religion? Is it simply good old-fashioned snake-oil salesmanship - known today as branding? It isn't the first diet to do this and it certainly won't be the last. The difference perhaps is the health risk involved of people's blood cholesterol levels doubling on this diet.

Charming and media friendly

Now I'm not a dietician or any kind of medical expert so please don't attack me on the medical side of this article or on how much weight you or your aunty have lost on this diet, I'm just using this as an example of brilliant salesmanship and branding.

Professor Tim Noakes is a successful brand and has been for some time. I've interviewed him many times over the years

and always found him charming and very media friendly. Note the last three words here - very media friendly. And let's face it he's always there for interviews - with a good story or two. He actively works at being in the media spotlight and far from being reactive is bold and proactive when it comes to propounding his beliefs.

To many who worship him as their diet guru, every word that comes out of his mouth, often without any real scientific evidence to back it, is gospel. The fact that he recently added that dairy may not be such a good idea after all, saw his critics and advocates jump to his attack and defence all at once. Whichever way you look at it he's getting lots of publicity for himself and his runaway best seller, *Real Meal Revolution*. A rare thing today - a best-selling book.

Not a week goes by without both positive and negative articles appearing in the media on Noakes and his theories - and therein lies the story. His voice is loud and often drowns out the others. The others' voices? We don't know because they're often too soft...

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.media mentors.co.za) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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