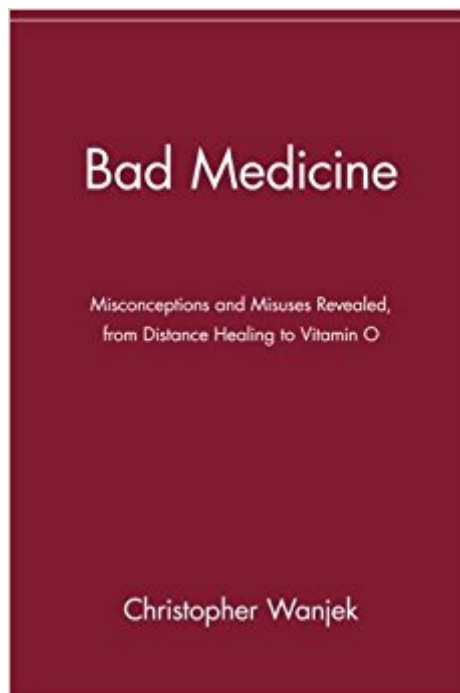




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Bad Medicine: Misconceptions And Misuses Revealed, From Distance Healing To Vitamin O



Synopsis

"Christopher Wanjek uses a take-no-prisoners approach in debunking the outrageous nonsense being heaped on a gullible public in the name of science and medicine. Wanjek writes with clarity, humor, and humanity, and simultaneously informs and entertains." -Dr. Michael Shermer, Publisher, Skeptic magazine; monthly columnist, Scientific American; author of Why People Believe Weird Things

Prehistoric humans believed cedar ashes and incantations could cure a head injury. Ancient Egyptians believed the heart was the center of thought, the liver produced blood, and the brain cooled the body. The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates was a big fan of bloodletting. Today, we are still plagued by countless medical myths and misconceptions. Bad Medicine sets the record straight by debunking widely held yet incorrect notions of how the body works, from cold cures to vaccination fears. Clear, accessible, and highly entertaining, Bad Medicine dispels such medical convictions as:

- * You only use 10% of your brain: CAT, PET, and MRI scans all prove that there are no inactive regions of the brain . . . not even during sleep.
- * Sitting too close to the TV causes nearsightedness: Your mother was wrong. Most likely, an already nearsighted child sits close to see better.
- * Eating junk food will make your face break out: Acne is caused by dead skin cells, hormones, and bacteria, not from a pizza with everything on it.
- * If you don't dress warmly, you'll catch a cold: Cold viruses are the true and only cause of colds.

Protect yourself and the ones you love from bad medicine-the brain you save may be your own.

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Customer Reviews

&Wanjek shoots and scores when he tackles the major myths of medicine& -- Focus, February 2003
For skeptics, always fans of science: The first two books in a series devoted to "bad science," Bad Astronomy by Philip Plait and Bad Medicine (Wiley, \$15.95) by Christopher Wanjek, may warm even a Scrooge's heart. In short chapters, Plait tackles misperceptions about why the moon looks larger on the horizon and why stars twinkle before moving on, dismantling conspiracy kooks who doubt the moon landing and offering a top 10 list of bad science moments in movie history. Wanjek, a science writer who has also written jokes for The Tonight Show and Saturday Night Live, takes an edgy and funny tack in debunking myths such as humans using only 10% of their brains, the utility of "anti-bacterial" toys and the safety of "natural" herbal remedies, ones often loaded with powerful chemicals. (USA TODAY, December 3, 2002) "...Bad Medicine is an enjoyable romp through a host of biomedical misconceptions..." (New Scientist, 21 December 2002) "...Wanjek shoots and scores when he tackles the major myths of medicine..." (Focus, February 2003) & Bad Medicine is an enjoyable romp through a host of biomedical misconceptions& -- New Scientist, 21 December 2002

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As a health professional with some background in conventional and alternative medicine, I can tell that there are many books out there that promote pseudoscience, conspiracy theories and dangerous diets. Christopher Wanjek's witty style puts all the myths, misconception and inflated fears in perspective. And he does it remarkably well, making this book not just enlightening and informative, but entertaining as well. However, the first couple of chapters aren't very impressive.

Most of us already know those myths about using only 10% of our brains and masturbation causing blindness. Then, Wanjek goes into the myth of liver detoxification - a concept readily accepted by most people in the field of wellness. It also seems rather easy to fool people into parting with plenty of cash to breathe pure oxygen for a few minutes. The author tells us (and it's true) that this may do more harm than good. The book starts to get interesting when the author talks about battling aging and obesity, heart disease and cancer. In a few short paragraphs, he debunks the Atkins diet. He also uncovers some of the myths and lies in unconventional cancer treatment like using shark cartilage. He also touches on our obsession with organic food and "clean" bottled water, showing us how organic and healthy our organic produce really is and how most bottled water come from the tap and not some melting glacier in the European Alps. Then comes a section devoted to decrediting aromatherapy, homeopathy, touch therapy, herbal treatment. Wanjek seems reasonably well informed of oriental medicine, what they can do and what they can't do. He is careful not to rule out everything but merely highlights some of the bizarre and unscientific claims from today's hardsell practitioners who appeal to today's sophisticated, new age consumer curious about the exotic East and the glorious when few people lived beyond 25. Wanjek also takes an insider's view of how studies are conducted, why the results are so confusing and how sponsors may affect the results of these studies in their favour. My favourite part has to be the way he takes a shot at Deepak Chopra the guru. When toxicity is concerned, Wajek brings out the things that frighten consumers, be they pesticides, pollutants, chlorine and fluoride in drinking water and even vaccines. Sensational examples give rise to sensational science. There are cults which believe that vaccines are a conspiracy by the government to poison people. Others wage wars against "toxins" which do more good than harm to almost all people. The author draws a comparison between people who smoke and yet complain about pollutants in the air. Without water purification and vaccines, many people will die each year. The risks from poisoning are negligible compared to the benefits. There is a chapter on Hollywood's medical myths, but I think most people already know that you if hit a bottle hard enough on a person's head to break the bottle, the guy can't just get up and run after the baddies. It's a very well-written, easy-to-read book that is easily understood even by those without much background knowledge. However, I find the articles too short and too varied. I would have preferred a book with a more central theme. Too many topics have been included. Some chapters should have been taken out and some should have been expanded.

It unfortunately descends into occasional rants, when it is obvious the author is personally offended by some spurious medical techniques. While I am no believer in such silliness as homeopathy, the

sarcasm and name calling are rather off-putting. And the tantrums do interfere with the informational content.

This book was ok as far as clearing up myths. Not my favorite but covered most products and myths

A well written and informative book; only the cell phone report needs updating (they are much worse than described).

A sane look at alternative medicine from a scientific point of view.

Actually some of the medicine debunked here is merely not effective beyond the placebo.

Homeopathy is a case in point. Wanjek includes it because he believes that people relying on such medicines tend to deprive themselves of real medicine. This may indeed be the case sometimes, but more often people turn to alternative medicine when conventional medicine fails. Clearly if one has an affliction that can be cured by conventional medicine and instead flies to the Philippines for some fake surgery, this is not good. On the other hand if the medical profession has stopped treating somebody's cancer, it is understandable that one might try anything. Still even this is sad since such desperation rewards quacks and charlatans. But this book is about much more than bad medicine. Wanjek actually takes on a wide range of phoniness from bad TV health reporting to urban witch doctors, from why we go gray to why the Rambo-like violence in movies is unrealistic and dangerously misleading. In fact, Wanjek's book is the widest ranging book of its kind that I have read and I've read a few; furthermore as far as I can tell he is right on the money. Some things I learned with interest: what the appendix actually does, and where the silly idea that we only use ten percent of our brain comes from, and why "Vitamin O" (oxygen) is just so much bunk. Also: how health studies are conducted well and not so well and how they can be fudged, and why it is highly unlikely that Julius Caesar was born of a Caesarean section since his mother lived on and in those days nobody, but nobody ever survived such an operation. There is also of course a lot that I already knew including the fact that the black plague is still with us, and that cold weather does not cause colds, and that antibiotics are useless against viruses (such as flu or cold viruses), and that radiation used in radiating food does not contaminate the food anymore than baking the food in a conventional oven does. Wanjek even changed my mind on a couple of things, and for these old eyes to see new light is a rarity. I used to give Chinese medical practice and India's ancient ayurvedic treatments the benefit of the doubt believing that all those many centuries of experience

counted for something. However, Wanjek makes the very excellent point that such medical traditions existed not because they were effective but because there was nothing else. He adds that conventional medicine is largely replacing these practices in their very countries of origin. Wanjek adds in implication that the entire history of medical practice up to (and to some very real extent) including modern times has been one long exercise in malpractice and painful ignorance. What horrors are we practicing on our patients today, one might ask, horrors to compare with bloodletting and Mayan brain surgery? Try chemotherapy for cancer, Wanjek suggests. The only fault I could find with the book is that in his discussion of why we are getting so fat and in his eagerness to nail the Atkins diet to the wall he failed to mention so-called "carbohydrate intolerance." (Maybe he doesn't like the phrase.) I want to therefore remind him that in the prehistory there were not only no fatted calves or choice cuts of beef but no amber waves of grain either. Humans have little tolerance for living with a lot of easily gotten carbs anymore than they have genes for resisting fat-laden foods. Before the rise of agriculture, gathering wheat and other grain plants was such a labor-intensive process that not even Momma Cass could get fat from eating grass seeds. Bottom line: the most comprehensive book on pseudoscience that I have read in recent years and one of the most readable.

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