

Four health fads you should not follow

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The only thing that seems to spread faster than rumours about pregnant celebrities are sellers of sketchy science. Sure, something like an ultrasound video of your unborn baby sounds like fun. Isn't that what your doctor orders? But here's why those done without your doc's supervision and other easy-to-find health "services" may be unhealthy for your body, your wallet or both.

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Do-it-yourself genetic tests are improving, but for now, spending \$10 a week on fruit and vegetables is better for your health than shelling out for one of these kits.

belly to feel those kicks.

Colon Cleansings

So-called high colonics may be a waste of your hard-earned cash. You can get the same colon-cleansing and toxin-eliminating effect with a 24-hour fast and without paying someone to push a tube into your lower intestines. Do a colonic to lose weight, and you'll be disappointed: Whatever they wash out will be replaced tomorrow. If you're trying to unclog stopped-up bowels, look to your diet. For a better number two, make eight glasses of water and 25 grams of fiber from foods like lima beans, whole grains and berries your number one priority.

Magnets

Energy medicine holds lots of promise, but there are no data that magnets have any more power than a placebo would. (That's not to discount the placebo effect, which works in 30 to 40 per cent of people!) So far, research doesn't support the most popular magnet claim: That they relieve pain. And the FDA has yet to approve marketing magnets that promise health benefits. So they're handy on your fridge, but don't spend extra money to put them in your shoes.

Do-it-yourself genetic tests

Soon they, combined with genetic counseling, will be ready for prime time. But not quite yet. And you can blow a wad of money on them. For \$30 (minimum), anyone can buy a DNA test at the drugstore. Take a sample of your DNA (usually swabbed from inside your cheek) and mail it to the test company.

Baby's first ultrasound video

"Ultrasound day" is a red-carpet event for expectant moms and dads: Finally, a chance to glimpse who's been growing in there. These sneak previews used to happen only under a doctor's orders, with a trained technician and in a medical facility with well-maintained equipment. But today, you can get your own baby ultrasound video at your local mall.

Our opinion? These mall ones may not be ideal for your baby; wait for birth to see your little one. Thanks to powerful ultrasound scanners and longer scan times, these for-profit prenatal portraits may expose unborn children to risky levels of heat and vibration.

Stick with the careful, brief, medically necessary ultrasounds your doctor orders. Meanwhile, enjoy baby activities the old-fashioned way: Put a hand on your

For an additional \$200 and up (sometimes way up), they'll test for markers of lupus, sickle-cell anemia, depression, glaucoma, celiac disease, cystic fibrosis ... the list will get enlarged and more meaningful in the next several years.

Gene testing promises to be an amazing tool. Mapping the human genome has yielded powerful new weapons against breast, ovarian, colon, prostate and other cancers. In fact, we have colleagues who refer people for testing for the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 breast cancer gene defects every week. Yet while research has identified genes and gene mutations that contribute to about 1,400 diseases or disorders, so far most of these provide only preliminary clues. And with certain diseases, such as Alzheimer's, genetic mutations increase your risk but don't always mean you'll get a disease.

Knowing your family history and sharing it with your doc can help you decide whether you need a genetic test from a certified lab, or whether you simply need to do all you can to safeguard your health against a risk that runs in your family. Besides, your lifestyle, not your genes, controls 70 per cent of how well you age.

Spending \$10 on fresh fruits and veggies at the farmer's market weekly will get you miles further than spending that much in three years on these kits. But stay tuned. Soon, these genetic tests, coupled with counseling, may become standard and important for your health choices.

The You Docs - Mike Roizen and Mehmet Oz - www.RealAge.com are authors of 'YOU: Being Beautiful - The Owner's Manual to Inner and Outer Beauty.' Their column runs Saturday.