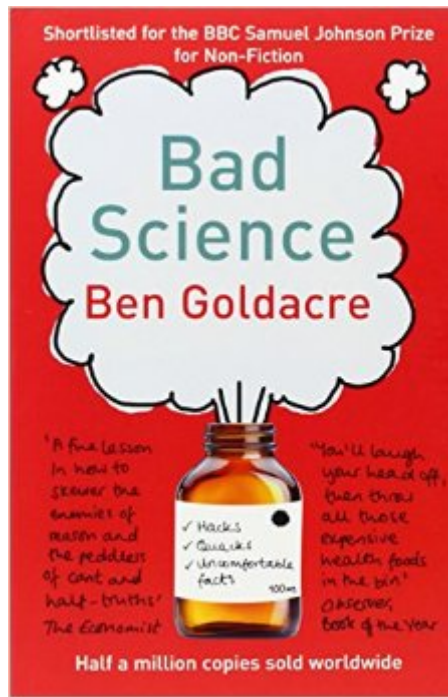


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Bad Science



Synopsis

Ben Goldacre's wise and witty bestseller, shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, lifts the lid on quack doctors, flaky statistics, scaremongering journalists and evil pharmaceutical corporations. Since 2003 Dr Ben Goldacre has been exposing dodgy medical data in his popular Guardian column. In this eye-opening book he takes on the MMR hoax and misleading cosmetics ads, acupuncture and homeopathy, vitamins and mankind's vexed relationship with all manner of 'toxins'. Along the way, the self-confessed 'Johnny Ball cum Witchfinder General' performs a successful detox on a Barbie doll, sees his dead cat become a certified nutritionist and probes the supposed medical qualifications of 'Dr' Gillian McKeith. Full spleen and satire, Ben Goldacre takes us on a hilarious, invigorating and ultimately alarming journey through the bad science we are fed daily by hacks and quacks.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I had to have someone traveling to London bring it back for me, and very worth it!! If you want a painless (and funny) intro into understanding science news, this is the place to get it. Dr. Goldacre may be writing in Britain, but everything he says is relevant to the way science and medicine is reported in this country. What are drug companies hiding? What is behind the good for you/bad for you news on health? What about alternative medicine and vitamins? How can I judge evidence for myself? You can learn quite a bit from this slender volume. Find a way to get it!

Ben Goldacre is a doctor who writes a weekly column in the Guardian exposing bad medicine. He

writes, "The hole in our culture is gaping: evidence-based medicine, the ultimate applied science, contains some of the cleverest ideas from the past two centuries, it has saved millions of lives, but there has never once been a single exhibit on the subject in London's Science Museum." He attacks the idea that social and political problems can be solved by pills, even Patrick Holford's Optimal Nutrition pills, or those of the TV 'nutritionist' Gillian McKeith, with her PhD from a non-accredited correspondence course 'college' in the USA. Their advice is just 'a manifesto of right-wing individualism', blaming people's ill-health on their food choices, not on the social inequality that drives health inequality. Dr Goldacre writes, "All too often this spurious privatisation of common sense is happening in areas where we could be taking control, doing it ourselves, feeling our own potency and our ability to make sensible decisions; instead we are fostering our dependence on expensive outside systems and people." He praises the brilliant Cochrane reviews of medical literature. He notes that to say that giving placebos in trials of treatments is unethical is to assume that the treatment is better, which is to assume what is being tested. We don't know the result of the trial before we do it - that is why we do trials. For example, trials have proven that the painkiller Vioxx caused 80,000-139,000 heart attacks, a third probably fatal, during its five years on the market. Trials have also discredited antioxidants, hormone replacement therapy and calcium supplements. Dr Goldacre notes that anti-arrhythmia drugs when given to all heart attack patients, not just to those with arrhythmic heartbeats, increased their risk of dying. He reminds us that Benjamin Spock's well-meant but wrong advice - that babies should sleep on their tummies - led to tens of thousands of cot deaths. What counts is the effect, not the intent. He recounts the media's disgraceful nine-year campaign against the Measles Mumps Rubella vaccine. The campaign caused an epidemic of mumps in Britain, with 5,000 cases in January 2005, and 2008 saw the highest number of measles cases since 1995. Nearly half of all homeopaths irresponsibly advised against taking the vaccine, as did almost a fifth of chiropractors. Only a few homeopaths and just a quarter of the chiropractors acted professionally and recommended it.

Maybe you are unfamiliar with Ben, maybe because he is a Brit, maybe because you don't read the Guardian newspaper (for shame), or maybe because you skip Ben's piece because he plays rough? Well for years I've been turning to his column first. Now there is a great book. Ben's Bad Science is a brilliant, well-argued polemic against charlatanry of all kind. I was first drawn to him as he exposed my favorite pet peeve - homeopathy. Then he trained his sights on the food supplements industry and its 'anti-oxidant' and 'super-food' shenanigans. But Bad Science doesn't just take aim at alternative quackery. Ben takes aim at Big Pharma for its shady research practices,

and shameful marketing practice. (Thank Jesus he doesn't live in the US with its prime-time onslaught of drug advertising - I don't think his blood pressure could take it.) He takes aim at Big Media - for misrepresenting and misusing science and for irresponsible reporting (MMR and MRSA). Well done Ben. If in your lifetime you can, chipping away, restore some sanity to the public understanding of science - you will make us all better off. Check out his site: [...] Paul Gibbons

I've written a review of this book as a whole previously, and there are plenty of reviews on the .co.uk product pages. Instead, I'll focus on the additional chapter "The Doctor Will Sue You Now". Ben Goldacre was taken to court in a libel lawsuit for pointing out the quack Matthias Rath's dishonesty. Well, he won the court case, and as a result, knows more about this man than most people alive. Goldacre posted this chapter, in its entirety, online and open source. It is a good sample of his writing style, and if you like the chapter you will like the book as a whole. I suggest you check it out, and then buy the book. Without this lawsuit and the publishing of this chapter, I doubt that I would have heard of, purchased, and thoroughly enjoyed this book.

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