What if I told you one of the leading threats to public health is something you encounter every day? You might see it when you’re watching TV, scrolling through Instagram or catching up with relatives on Facebook. Misinformation lurks everywhere. Federal law states that ads must be truthful, not misleading and backed by science. But lifestyle brands like Goop continue to peddle products like bio frequency stickers. A 2014 study found that very few products promoted by televised medical shows had any basis in science. If wealthy people want to buy snake oil, or today’s equivalent flat tummy teeth, that’s their prerogative. However, the consequences of getting health advice on Instagram can be dire. Some fad cleanses can be directly detrimental to health, like consuming activated charcoal which can render medications ineffective. It can also get in the way of seeking actual health care while normalizing the dangerous idea that scientific facts are mere suggestions. Science is increasingly under attack, and as a result, important public health advances have been called into question. The most obvious example is the anti-vaccination movement which has already claimed innocent lives.
You must be your own advocate when it comes to making health decisions and that includes getting information from reputable sources which will never try to sell you a magic pill, act as a stand in for advice from a licensed physician or have its basis in retracted science. Scientific research is our best tool to separate fact from fiction, and it is not a matter of opinion.