

Writing Portfolio

Jaime A. Heidel

"Effective Copy That Speaks Your Language."

Contact Information

Email: jaimeheidel@yahoo.com

Website: www.jaimeaheidel.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jaimeheidel>

Note: *All documents included in this portfolio are samples to be used only to assess writing skill and style. None of the pieces in this portfolio are for public use, private use, distribution, or reproduction of any kind without written permission from the author.*

Table of Contents

Articles

1. ["Got Allergies? Clean Green!"](#)
2. ["Understand the Difference Between Helping and Enabling"](#)
3. ["Adverse Childhood Experiences Linked to Adult Chronic Disease"](#)
4. ["Do You Need Dietary Supplements? Yes and No."](#)
5. ["10 Common Email & Internet Scams - How to Avoid Them"](#)

About Me

1. [About Me](#)
2. [What I Can Do for You](#)
3. [Testimonials](#)

Got Allergies? Clean Green!

Published in "Natural Awakenings Magazine" - April 2014

Spring is in the air, and with it comes the pollen and ragweed that sends over half of the population scurrying into the relative safety of their homes, windows closed, tissues at the ready. Are you one of them? According to the *American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology*, approximately 54% of the US population suffers from some sort of allergy.

In the past 60 years, incidents of allergies have risen substantially and so has the diagnosis of autoimmune disease. With an allergy, our immune systems mistake a harmless substance outside our bodies (pollen, pet dander) as a foreign invader and triggers an inflammatory response. In autoimmune disease, our immune system misidentifies and attacks our own healthy tissue (lungs, intestines), resulting in a chronic inflammatory response.

If you suffer from allergies, staying inside may not keep you safe, especially if you plan to do some spring cleaning. The average household cleaning product contains 62 toxic chemicals that can exacerbate existing symptoms and bring on some new ones.

Since there is no federal regulation for any of the chemicals used in conventional cleaning products, we can never be sure what we're being exposed to. This spring, play it safe and clean green.

Synthetic Chemical Cleaners May Worsen Allergies and Autoimmune Disease

Nearly everyone with autoimmune disease also has a compromised digestive system. When we clean our homes with products containing synthetic chemicals, it can worsen symptoms by further depleting our healthy gut bacteria, even though we're only inhaling, not swallowing the product.

Dr. Mark J. Joachim, D.C., who practices in Norwalk, CT, has seen a striking rise in the amount of multiple food and chemical sensitivities as well as autoimmune dysfunction in the patients he has treated for 22 years.

"The synthetic chemicals in our food and environment are a constant challenge to our bodies and have a detrimental effect on our health by compromising our digestive and immune systems."

Since over 70% of our immune systems reside in our gut, keeping our digestive systems healthy and filled with beneficial bacteria is our first step to preventing

chronic disease.

“As our gut is compromised through exposure to certain medications, unhealthy food sources (processed and GMO foods) and synthetic chemicals we develop intolerances/sensitivities,” Joachim explains.

Over time, these intolerances and sensitivities can turn into permanent allergies and cause such a disruption of the immune system, it turns on itself, resulting in autoimmune disease.

Dr. Joachim currently uses the *BioSET Allergy Elimination System*, which has the ability to permanently eliminate food and environmental allergies.

Avoid the 10 Most Dangerous Synthetic Chemical Cleaners

Below is a list of the top 10 most dangerous synthetic chemicals in your cleaning products. Are you using them in your home?

1. Formaldehyde

Formaldehyde (commonly used in funeral homes for the purposes of embalming) has been declared by the *National Cancer Institute* as a known human carcinogen. Exposure to this chemical has been linked to chronic upper respiratory distress and contact dermatitis. Expectant mothers should be especially wary of using any cleaning product containing formaldehyde as prenatal exposure has been linked to development disorders. This chemical is often found in wood cleaner and aerosol propellants.

2. Dioxin

Chlorine from bleach eventually turns into dioxin. The [*World Health Organization (WHO)*] has declared dioxins a danger because they “affect a number of organs and systems”. This chemical has also been declared as a probable human carcinogen by *The Environmental Protection Agency*. Dioxin has been linked to birth defects, deformities, developmental delays and immune system damage. One of the most dangerous aspects of dioxin is that it is absorbed by fat tissue and can remain in the body for 7-11 years. Anything labeled “antimicrobial” or “antibacterial” could potentially contain this chemical compound.

3. Benzene

Benzene is a component of products derived from coal and petroleum and is found in gasoline and other fuels. According to *OSHA.gov*: “Long-term exposure

may affect bone marrow and blood production. Short-term exposure to high levels of benzene can cause drowsiness, dizziness, unconsciousness and even death." It has also been linked to the development of leukemia. Benzene is commonly found in furniture polish.

4. **Chloroform**

The Environmental Protection Agency has classified chloroform as a Group B2 probable human carcinogen. Chronic long-term exposure to this chemical has been associated with neurological impairment, mood disorders, hepatitis, and jaundice. Chloroform is often found in degreasing agents and carpet spot removers. Also, when we combine a chemical cleaner containing Triclosan and chlorinated water, we get chloroform.

5. **Toluene**

Toluene is a clear, water-insoluble liquid derived from coal tar and petroleum. *The Centers for Disease Control* has labeled this chemical as "Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health Concentrations" (IDLH) as it has been linked to extreme fatigue, mental confusion, nausea, headache, and dizziness from exposure in small concentrations. Toluene is most commonly found in brush cleaners, varnish, and wood-finishing agents.

6. **Propylene Glycol**

Although propylene glycol has not been linked to nearly as many negative health effects as others, hidden allergy to propylene glycol is quite common. Repeated exposure to this chemical can be caustic to the nasal passages and lungs. This chemical is often used as a solvent and enzyme stabilizer in a multitude of cleaning products.

7. **Parabens**

Autoimmune thyroid disease could be, in part, the result of exposure to parabens. According to a study published in the *Journal of Reproductive Toxicology*, parabens can mimic estrogen, and disrupt the body's hormone system. The study revealed that the effects of parabens may be "thyrotoxic" and also contribute to reproductive and developmental disorders. Parabens can be found in a multitude of household cleaners.

8. **Phthalates**

Phthalates are considered endocrine-disrupting chemicals and are "reasonably

anticipated to be a human carcinogen" by the "Twelfth Report on Carcinogens" published by the *National Toxicology Program*. These chemicals can be found in multiple cleaning products but are most commonly found in air fresheners.

9. **Triclosan**

Triclosan is a synthetic antibacterial agent that has been recently linked to the development of antibiotic-resistance, the inability of prescription antibiotics to kill bacteria. Triclosan has chlorinated structures that bind to your thyroid gland, which displaces essential iodine, and causes chronic inflammation. If we use antibacterial soap and chlorinated water to clean our homes, we are being exposed to Triclosan as well as chloroform.

10. **Chlorine**

Chlorine bleach is quite caustic and can result in chest pains, upper respiratory distress, and eye irritation. According to a study published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Immunology*, chronic exposure to chlorine during a period of inflammation (sickness or injury) could result in the development of an autoimmune disease. Any product containing bleach contains chlorine.

Ditch the Chemicals and Clean Green

More and more of us are turning to greener products in an attempt to reduce our allergies, as well as our carbon footprint. However, as these products become more popular, more manufacturers struggle to keep up while keeping costs down. This results in many products being labeled "natural" and "organic" when they actually contain synthetic fragrances and chemicals.

Shaklee has created completely organic cleaning products since 1956. The products they produce are plant-based and contain no harmful fumes, phthalates, or bisphenol-A. Shaklee's cleaning products also save energy and eliminate excess waste by coming in recyclable or reduced-waste packaging. They are highly-concentrated so a little goes a long way.

Debbie Miron, Authorized Shaklee Distributor, understands that good health means more than eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise. "When it comes to being your healthiest self, what you put around your body is just as important as what you put in your body. That's why home should be the safest place on earth."

This is good advice, especially if you live with allergies or an autoimmune disease. Your home should be your sanctuary, a healing place where everything around

you is designed to improve your health or, at the very least, not harm it.

If you're on a budget, you can still clean your home without synthetic chemicals and rest assured you're doing the best for your health.

Nancy Sherr, owner of Chamomile Natural Foods in Danbury, CT, says the best way to clean your home in a safe, low-cost is to use a popular salad dressing. "The easiest way to clean your house on a budget is to use distilled white vinegar. You can pick up a gallon cheaply at most supermarkets. It cuts through grease and kills most bacteria. The vinegar smell does not linger, but if does bother you, add a favorite essential oil to the bottle before using."

You can also combine the vinegar with castile soap, an olive oil-based soap, which gives you that familiar "sudsy" effect while dialing down the strong scent of the vinegar. Fresh lemon oil and baking soda is another effective way to clean your home naturally.

Even if you don't have allergies or an autoimmune disease, take a careful inventory of your cleaning products. The synthetic chemicals they contain could be doing damage, little by little, that you may not see for years, or even decades to come.

Switch to a certified organic line of products like Shaklee or Method or clean your home the way your great-grandmother did, with good old-fashioned vinegar, lemon oil, baking soda and castile soap. Your immune system (not to mention the planet) will thank you!

Understand the Difference Between Helping and Enabling

Published on "I Told You I Was Sick" - June 2014

It's the middle of the night. Your phone rings. You know who it is before you pick up. Your friend is in crisis again. She's had too much to drink and needs to talk. You rush over, bleary-eyed and half-asleep to listen as she pours her heart out about the same problems you've been listening to for years.

When she's finished, she looks at you with sparkling eyes and calls you her "angel" and says she "doesn't know where she'd be without you."

It can be very easy to fall into the trap of thinking you're being paid a high compliment here. **You're not.** Somewhere in your friendship, you crossed the line between helping and enabling and your friend became dependent on you.

When you don't know the difference between helping and enabling (as I didn't for many years), it's easy to get taken advantage of, used up, and thrown away like yesterday's trash.

The worst thing about enabling? You will not be rewarded with more love and affection from the person you mistakenly believe you're helping.

Just the opposite. In fact, they will grow to resent you.

The Creepy Meaning Behind "You're My Angel" Statements

I had a close friend for many years who would call me his "angel". I don't think he had any sinister intentions when he said this. He honestly meant it as a compliment.

Unfortunately, he was someone I enabled for many years. Whenever I would bail him out of a jam, he would look at me with this round, almost worshipful eyes and tell me he didn't know what he would do without me.

Think about that for a minute. I mean, really think about the meaning of those words.

Do they imply you are more than human, and, therefore, capable of giving without end? That if they didn't have you in their life because you had a long illness, went on vacation or fell in love, they would fall apart and be unable to function?

Take that into consideration.

The Common Types of Behavior That Lure Enabling

When you are someone who has a big heart, empathizes with others, and cannot stand to see someone in pain, you want to help. It almost goes against your nature not to.

I consider myself the former poster child for this type of behavior.

Here are 3 common behaviors that are easy to enable:

- **Lazy Behavior**

This is the person who always overstays his welcome, eats your food, bums money off you, and makes up excuses as to why he's still unemployed, or underemployed.

His bills are piling up. Collection agencies are knocking on his door and he's pulling his hair out from the stress. But no matter how many times you suggest an employment agency, credit counseling, or debt consolidation, your advice goes in one ear and out the other, often while he pockets yet another handout.

- **Addictive Behavior**

She's your closest friend. Ever since high school, she's been a party queen. She drinks. She smokes. She curses. She's brash and obnoxious, and embarrasses you in front of others. Yet you're the one she always turns to when things get bleak. Despite your best intentions, the slightest hint of an AA meeting has her flying off the handle or bursting into tears.

- **Abusive Behavior**

He's the love of your life. When you first entered into the relationship, he showered you with flowers, jewelry, compliments, and never let your feet touch the ground. You talked for hours and your love life was on fire. Overnight, he changed. His personality is so different now, you barely recognize him. He's verbally and physically abusive and just laughs when you suggest counseling. You hang on and pray for the man you once knew to return.

The Difference Between Helping and Enabling

The difference between helping and enabling boils down to this:

When you help someone, you give them a hand up. When you enable someone, you give them a handout.

- **Examples of Helping**

- **Listening** - You can never go wrong by listening to someone talk about their problems. Sometimes, the suffering person just needs a sounding board and to know they are being heard.
- **Encouragement** - I'm a recovering advice-giver. I used to get right in there and try to "fix" the problem myself. Now, I try to focus on encouraging statements such as, "You're stronger than you think" and "You'll get through this".
- **Resources** - If you are going to give advice (which I still do), offer it in the form of resources. If they have an addiction, suggest a meeting appropriate to the condition. If it's a mental illness, suggest counseling or a support group. Stop there. This puts the ball back in their court.
- **Assistance** - When the person really is unable to physically or mentally do something, this is a good time to offer your assistance. This will be more greatly appreciated than doing for them what they can clearly do themselves.

- **Examples of Enabling**

- **Reinforcing Negative Behavior** - This would be giving money to an addict, picking up after a lazy person, or silently withstanding abuse.
- **Keeping Secrets** - Keeping secrets about addictive and abusive behavior is dangerous to both parties and perpetuates the problem.
- **Assuming Responsibilities** - Assuming responsibilities for your lazy friend by paying his share of the rent of cleaning up after him virtually guarantees he'll never move out.
- **Idol Threats** - Telling your friend or partner you will exit the relationship if they "ever do that again" and not following through ensures the person will never respect you or take you seriously.

Suffering is Not Always Bad

Nobody wants the people they love to suffer. I used to believe with every fiber of my being that suffering was something that needed to immediately be "fixed".

Then I got deeper into my spirituality and began to understand that in order for an individual to grow, he or she must experience some suffering. With suffering comes lessons, growth, and change.

This is why so many of the people you think you're helping end up resenting you. You're not allowing them to fall flat on their face when that's exactly what they need to grow.

Saying "No" is a Powerful Way to Reestablish Healthy Boundaries

The first time you tell your loved one that you need to either leave or set healthy boundaries, you will get an earful. Expect an explosion of anxiety, panic, hysterical crying, begging, pleading, rage, and maybe even some threats.

This is the monster you've been feeding finally rearing its ugly head. No, your loved one isn't a monster. This creature is the part of the person that developed as a result of being mired in addiction, unhealthy behavior or mental illness for years or even decades.

Stand your ground. Get away from them if it means your safety. Call 911 if it means your safety. Do not give in. Firmly tell them where your boundaries are and reinforce them by sticking to your guns.

After the drama has calmed down, they will do one of two things: They will either pick themselves up and finally get the help they need or they will find another "angel" they "don't know what they'd do without".

Trust me.

Again, if at any point during these confrontations, you feel your loved one will become dangerous to himself or others, **call 911 immediately**. Do not let the other person try to control you. They have no control of themselves. Get them the help they need and keep yourself safe at all times.

When you free yourself from the toxic cycle of an enabling relationship, you also free the person you've most wanted to help.

Adverse Childhood Experiences Linked to Adult Chronic Disease

Published on "The Best Years in Life" - July 2014

Do you suffer from chronic illness? If so, you certainly have plenty of company. According to The National Institutes of Health, up to 23.5 million Americans have been diagnosed with an autoimmune disease. The Institute of Medicine of The National Academies estimates up to 100 million Americans struggle with some type of chronic pain condition. Oftentimes, the two overlap.

Whether you're following a conventional method of treatment, are going the alternative route or use a combination of both, you may have found varying degrees of relief. But there's something going on that just doesn't seem to allow your condition to go into remission the way you want it to.

No matter how "good" you are, the disease is still there, following you around like a shadow just waiting for you to let down your guard.

So what's the missing link?

It could be traumatic experiences from your childhood.

Maybe your childhood isn't something you really remember, or even want to recall. Perhaps it was such a trying time for you, you're now living with anxiety, depression or PTSD. Or, on the other hand, your childhood was mostly drama-free but there was one incident (a death of a loved one, a house fire, etc.) that affected you deeply.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is an ongoing study that started 25 years ago. It measures the effect of traumatic childhood experiences on the immune system. According to the study, two-thirds of the world's population has an ACE score of at least 1. Those who score a 4 or higher on the scale are **86% more likely to develop a chronic disease in adulthood.**

Chronic Diseases Linked to Adverse Childhood Experiences

It is truly amazing how resilient children are. It seems no matter what struggles they endure during their formative years, their growing, neuroplastic brains are able to compensate for their surroundings and protect them from whatever onslaught they may have to face.

Unfortunately, these coping mechanisms can have negative effects into adulthood. The brain is re-wired for chronic stress, which, in turn, causes hormonal imbalance and immune abnormalities.

Compounding this is the strong likelihood that the child who endured will grow up to be the adult who is a workaholic, perfectionist, alcoholic, binge eater, or drug addict. This creates a perfect storm for the development of chronic disease.

Even if there is no drug or alcohol abuse, and the diet is relatively healthy, childhood trauma puts the body into a constant state of fight-or-flight, which is more than enough to trigger the immune system into attacking healthy tissue.

The most common health problems associated with adverse childhood experiences are:

- **Autoimmune Disease**

A research study published by Carnegie Mellon University proved that chronic psychological stress interferes with the body's ability to regulate its own natural inflammatory response. This means the development of conditions like chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, lupus, and thyroid disease could be caused, at least in part, by adverse childhood experiences.

- **Food and Environmental Allergies**

When your immune system is in overdrive, everyday stimuli becomes suspect and intolerable to it. Pollen, pet dander, hay, and certain foods cause the immune system to go on the attack, resulting in strong reactions like gastrointestinal distress, rash outbreaks, sneezing, wheezing, coughing, and, in severe cases, anaphylactic shock. It's as though the body is completely rejecting its own environment.

- **Cardiovascular Disease**

A study published by the *Journal of Hypertension* used the ACE study to research the connection between traumatic childhood events and cardiovascular disease. The study measured 221 healthy adolescents and adults for blood pressure, heart output of blood, and levels of endothelin-1, a protein responsible for constricting blood vessels, thus increasing blood pressure.

Endothelin-1 levels appeared to be affected most by childhood trauma. Participants who have experienced at least one traumatic event in childhood had endothelin-1 levels that were 18 percent higher than adults who reported no trauma. Those who endured two or more traumatic events had a 24 percent increase in this protein.

- **Mental Illness**

From the *Journal of Psychiatry (Edgmont)*:

"Trauma appears to be a specific psychosocial variable that potentially heightens an individual's emotional response to the external environment."

The development of a mental illness after trauma, therefore, has to do with the brain being rewired. This is a real physiological response to extreme stress, not a sign of weakness, or something someone can easily "get over".

- **Developmental Delays**

Developmental delays are often attributed to children, but the effects of them can last throughout adulthood and have a significant impact on social and professional life. Mild autism, Asperger's syndrome (now defunct in the medical books but still relevant for many), and traumatic brain injury can cause behavioral abnormalities that make function in everyday life a challenge.

Autobiographical Writing as a Healing Tool for Childhood Trauma

In her book, "Dying to Live – Running Backwards Through Cancer, Lupus and Chronic Illness", author, Amy Susan Crohn, offers a detailed account of her own adverse childhood experiences and how discovering the ACE study helped her to gain a unique perspective on her own chronic health conditions.

A quote from her book:

"If, in truth, the reason my tumor was centered in my heart was because my heart was so cut off from unconditional love that it put layers upon layers upon layers of armor on itself for protection, perhaps it was my time to implode."

This may sound like a spiritual statement, but the science behind it is quickly beginning to catch up.

Part of the healing process of the ACE study is autobiographical journaling. Writing about the traumatic experiences helps the writer delve deep within to find long-buried sources of pain and release them into the open.

Even if the journals never see the light of day, this technique, coupled with a healing diet and supplements, could help reverse the effects of this trauma and help the adult survivor finally experience a new level of recovery.

More Options for Healing from Childhood Trauma in Your Adult Life

It can be very difficult to look back on events you would rather not think about. However, if you aren't willing to deal with them, they will deal with you. If you have a chronic condition, they already are. Those emotions need to find release somewhere and the pain and fatigue you feel is their only outlet.

Find time to journal, join a support group, even if it's just online to start, talk with a therapist and reconnect with your spiritual side. Once you do this, the natural treatments you're using now will work more in harmony with your body and the conventional ones causing all those side effects may no longer be necessary.

Do You Need Dietary Supplements? Yes and No.

Published on "Health on a Budget" - September 2014

Do you need dietary supplements? There's a lot of conflicting information out there about the use of nutritional supplements and whether or not they're beneficial.

As vitamin and mineral supplements continue to gain popularity, some conventional health proponents have written articles claiming that not only are they useless, they could actually be harmful to your health.

No wonder you're confused.

The truth is, by and large, dietary supplements are not a danger to your health. The only way they can be is if you are allergic to them, overdosing on them, or combining them with contraindicated prescription medications.

However, in order to receive the maximum health benefits from them, you have to be sure you're taking the right ones.

Why People Take Dietary Supplements

The most common reasons people take dietary supplements are to lose weight, improve their energy, sleep better, and treat nutrient deficiencies.

Over the past 20 to 30 years, nutrient deficiencies have risen to near-epidemic proportions. According to WorldWatch Institute, the nutrient density of the food we eat is much lower than it was in previous generations.

This means even if we got our recommended daily allowance (RDA) of fruits and vegetables each day, (which most of us don't) we would actually need to eat twice that amount to receive the same amount of nutrition our great-grandparents received.

And many of us eat more junk food than health food anyway. Some of us don't see a vegetable on our plate more than once or twice a month. A diet made up primarily of highly-processed foods interferes with healthy digestion and nutrient absorption, and often leads to the development of chronic health problems.

Chronic gastrointestinal conditions like acid reflux disease, leaky gut syndrome, celiac disease, and Crohn's disease can lead to malabsorption of nutrients as well.

The Health Risks of the Most Common Nutrient Deficiencies

1. **Vitamin D3**

Vitamin D3 deficiency is the most common vitamin deficiency in the United States and Canada.

Symptoms of this deficiency include chronic pain, lowered immunity, bone loss, cognitive decline, psychiatric symptoms, oral health problems, and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer.

According to a study published by the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, supplementation with calcium and vitamin D3 reduced the risk of all cancers in postmenopausal women.

2. **Magnesium**

A generation or two ago, our soil was rich in magnesium, which was absorbed by our produce before it came to our table. Not so these days. This, coupled with poor digestion and malabsorption disorders, has led to a widespread deficiency in this essential mineral.

Symptoms of magnesium deficiency include depression, anxiety, insomnia, nervous twitches and ticks, muscle spasms and weakness, abnormal heart rhythms, and bone loss.

Most natural healthcare practitioners and nutritionists recommend taking magnesium in combination with vitamin D3 as they work best together.

3. **Vitamin B12**

It is estimated that 40 percent of people between the ages of 26 to 40 are deficient in this essential vitamin.

If you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, have a malabsorption disorder, or are on certain prescription medications such as proton pump inhibitors for acid reflux or Metformin for diabetes, you may be deficient in vitamin B12.

Symptoms include learning disabilities, anxiety, depression, cognitive impairment, dementia, infertility, low blood pressure, and incontinence.

4. **Omega-3 Fatty Acids**

Omega-3 fatty acids are called essential fatty acids because your body cannot

make them. You need to get them from food. Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids include oily fish, krill, algae, flax seed, and nut oils. If you are not eating a diet rich in these fats or if you have a digestive disorder, you may be deficient.

Symptoms of a deficiency in omega-3 fatty acids include fatigue, poor memory, heart problems, dry skin, mood swings, and depression.

5. **Iron**

The World Health Organization estimates that up to 700 million people are deficient in this essential mineral. Vegetarians, vegans, and those who are on an extreme weight-loss regimen may be at risk for this deficiency.

Symptoms include fatigue, weakness, pale skin, tingling or crawling feeling in the legs, and cravings for non-food items such as dirt, ice or clay.

Less is More - Avoid the Temptation to Take Too Many Supplements

As I mentioned above, dietary supplements are safe for most people. However, it is important to resist the temptation to try a bunch of new and different ones just because they're natural and available.

Talk with your healthcare provider about testing for nutrient deficiencies so you can choose the right combination for your individual needs. If you take prescription medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist if there are any interaction warnings.

Also, when selecting dietary supplements, avoid buying them from discount stores or from your grocer's shelf. Oftentimes, those supplements are subpar and contain potentially-harmful synthetic sweeteners, food dyes, and other unnecessary chemicals.

Instead, shop at a health food store or, better yet, buy your supplements online. This way, you'll save both money and time without compromising your health.

10 Common Email & Internet Scams: How to Avoid Them

Published on "Money Crashers" - April 2012

I've been using the Internet since 1997, way before the invention of popular social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter. Since the beginning, I've seen my fair share of email scams, hoaxes, and other types of cyberspace SPAM. I've even fallen for some of them.

The Purpose of Online Scams

In order to understand why cybercrime is such a lucrative business for Internet con artists, it's important to understand the main purpose of social networking and email scams. The three most common reasons are to:

- Steal Your Money
- Steal Your Information (Identity Theft)
- Infect Your Computer with spyware (Which, They Can Then Use to Steal Your Money or Your Information)

Once you realize what they're after, it becomes easier to identify an email scam or social networking ploy. Now, the next time you see an email in your inbox claiming you've won the Transylvanian lottery with a request for your bank account information, a light bulb will go off in your head.

Aha! They don't want to *give* me money. They want to *steal* my money or my identity! (Also, you never really entered the Transylvania lottery, did you?)

Email Scams

Scam artists got their cybercrime start with email scams. This list breaks down the five most common types of email scams:

The Foreign Lottery Scam

This is one of the most common types of email scams. It's been running rampant for over a decade. In this email, you receive what looks like an official email from a foreign lottery corporation. The subject line reads something like, "Congratulations! You've won the (insert country here) Lottery!" It may also include the amount of "winnings" you supposedly earned.

Here are the sure signs your "winnings" are nothing but a clever scam:

- **The Sender is a Person.** The fakes are easy to spot when you know what to look for. Number one, the sender is most likely a person. For example, mikesmith1453@earthlink.com. No lottery corporation, foreign or domestic will send you a notification via email, let alone from an individual person. The email address is a fake.
- **Your Name is Not in the "To" Section.** Another obvious sign this is nothing but an email scam is your name is not in the "To" section. This email has been sent to hundreds if not thousands of people, which is why this section is blank.
- **The Lottery Doesn't Exist.** Another way to assure this supposed windfall is nothing more than a clever hoax is to take a look at the name of the lottery. Doing a simple Google search will not only yield no actual corporation but will probably lead you to a forum or website warning you of this email scam.
- **Request for Information.** Here's where they really get you. The request for information portion of this email scam will routinely request your full name, date of birth, address, and telephone number as well as the reference, ticket, and serial number on the winning email. The foreign lottery scam is a type of "phishing" scam designed to get more information out of you. Once you respond with this information, they've "hooked" you and will ask for your bank account number so they can drain your account or steal your identity.

The best way to avoid this common email scam is to realize this one simple rule: If you *did not enter* the lottery, you will not *win* the lottery.

The Survey Scam

This common email scam looks innocent enough. You've expressed interest in social issues such as global warming or the war in the Middle East and you've been sent a survey that requests your input. Why not participate? Unless you've specifically requested to be on a survey mailing list, what you're getting is nothing but SPAM.

When you click on the link to take the survey or any one of the images contained in the email, malicious spyware or malware will be installed on your computer. Once this is done, con artists and other cybercriminals can spy on every move you make on your computer, collecting passwords, bank account information, and much more.

The next thing you know, you get a genuine bill from your credit card company for thousands of dollars worth of electronics you never purchased. This is identity theft, and it can ruin your life.

When in doubt, hit the 'delete' key or better yet, mark it as 'SPAM'.

The PayPal Scam

This one got me several years ago, and boy did it irritate me. The PayPal scam is terrible and at first, you may really believe there's something wrong with your account. The sender's name comes in as PayPal with a warning message such as "Act Now! Your Account Will Be Deactivated" or "Security Breach on Your Account". You panic, open the email and click the link to go to the PayPal website. You log in, look around, and don't see the problem.

The problem is *you're not on PayPal's website!* You've just given your email address and password to your actual PayPal account to a cybercriminal who can now use that information to change your password and clean you out. They may even use this information to scam your friends and business associates disguised as you!

Here's some sure fire ways to tell this email is nothing but a scam:

- **The Sender's Email Address is Suspicious.** Hover your mouse over the sender's email address. It may read "PayPalSecurityCenter", but look closely at the real email address. Most likely it looks a lot less legitimate. Something like, 'security-paypal-center@int.paypal.uk.org' is a dead giveaway you're being taken for a ride.
- **They Don't Know Who You Are.** Whether it's PayPal or your credit card company, if you do business with them, they'll know your name, and they'll use every opportunity to use it. Any correspondence beginning with 'Dear Valued Customer' is a scam.
- **The URL is Not Legitimate.** Hover over the 'click here' or 'take action now' link and you'll see a strange URL that's certainly not taking you to PayPal.com or your credit card company website. Don't click the link.
- **They Include a Veiled Threat.** This is how they got me. It wasn't PayPal but my credit card company. They told me there was some security breach on my account and if I deleted the email, they'd have no choice but to temporarily suspend my account. I clicked on the link and input my email address, password, and bank account information before I even thought about it. Thankfully, something tipped me off and I was able to call and cancel the card before anything happened.

Remember, no legitimate company will ever threaten to close your account if you ignore an email.

The Secret Shopper Scam

The secret shopper or mystery shopper scam has a couple of different variations, but it's designed to steal your money, your information or both. This common work from home scam begins with an email with a subject line promising you'll make boku bucks as a mystery shopper. You read through the email and find you need no experience or education and you can make up to \$200-\$300 a day doing just what you love: Shopping!

Here's the catch:

- **You Have to Pay Them Upfront.** The money looks good but in order to get your “training materials”, you have to send them some money through PayPal, your bank account, or a personal check. You send the money and wait for a package that never arrives.
- **They Send You a Fraud Check.** This one is even worse. You send them your address and they send you a fraud check in the mail as your first ‘payment’. They just need you to send some of the money back to cover your ‘study materials’. You cash the check, wire back the requested amount of money, the check you deposited bounces, and you’re responsible for over one thousand dollars or more of fraudulent check charges plus overdraft fees.

Remember, if you didn’t apply for a job, you won’t be offered a job. They don’t just fall out of the sky. Furthermore, if you’re ever asked to spend money upfront for materials, you are being scammed.

The Nigerian Check Scam

Another of the more popular email scams is the Nigerian check scam. In it, you are sent an email from an official or royal-sounding person with the name of “Sir Arthur Von-Monsoon” or “Barrister Frank N. Stein” with a request to please help some down and out victim recover gigantic sums of money from an overseas bank. As a reward, you’ll receive a handsome cut of the cash. Nice, huh?

It seems like a win-win situation so you respond with your willingness to help. You are told the money will be transferred to your bank account so you’ll need to put up this information. Also, there are transfer fees involved so you have to pay those. Once you pay a couple hundred dollars, waiting for your huge windfall, you receive another email stating there’s some type of holdup and they need you to send a bit more cash.

This will continue on until you, the unsuspecting victim, wise up and realize the money is only going one way: Out of *your* bank account and straight into *theirs*!

Social Networking Scams

Since the invention of social networking sites, you can connect with friends, relatives, and even celebrities all over the world! The problem? You can also connect with a wide variety of cybercriminals who specialize in online hoaxes.

Here's a short list of the most common types of social networking scams:

The Hijacked Profile

This one happened to me recently. A girl I'd gone to high school with suddenly sent me a message on Facebook that read something like this: "Hey girl, if you get some time, will you give me a call?"

I frowned at this. We're nothing more than passing acquaintances at best and we've never once spoken on the phone. I thought it was a bit suspicious, but I messaged her back and told her I couldn't make long-distance phone calls. She responded by saying she had this wonderful business opportunity for me to get in on, and sent me a couple of links.

At this point, I knew it was a scam even though she mentioned she wanted to share this opportunity with a fellow (insert name of high school) alum. Her profile had obviously been hacked, but the scammer was really clever using personal details like where we went to school. I ended up deleting her from my friend's list because I couldn't get a hold of her to tell her she'd been hacked.

These hoaxes can seem very real. Say you have a friend who travels often and posts pictures and updates about his various exploits. Suddenly, he sends you an urgent message claiming to be stuck somewhere overseas and needs some money to get home. Before you send any, try to contact him another way. He could be the victim of a hacked account.

The Quiz Scam

Now I'm glad I delete all app requests and never take quizzes. Turns out those "Which Twilight Character are You"? and the like quizzes all your friends are taking could end up costing you a monthly charge! It starts out innocently enough: You see the quiz on your friend's profile, click on it, and enter your cell phone number as instructed. The quiz pops up, you take it and find out you're more an Alice than a Bella and promptly post it on your profile for all of your friends to see and participate in.

When next month rolls around, you're shocked to learn that a \$9.95 monthly fee has been added to your cell phone bill for some dubious "monthly service". How did a monthly charge get on your cell phone? Remember the quiz asked you for your cell phone number in order for you to take it? You were so anxious to get the results you didn't even stop to wonder why they wanted it. Now you know. Not only that, but some of your friends are none too happy with you because they're now dealing with the same charge.

The "Hey, Check Out This Photo of You" Scam

This one is just not fair and it's one of the most popular ways cyber con artists obtain your login information so they can hijack your account. One of your friends, whose account has been hacked, posts a link on your page with a message like, "OMG! Is this a naked picture of *you*?"

You freak out, click on the link and find yourself on the Facebook login page again. You shrug, figuring it's just one of Facebook's many glitches and log in again.

BOOM! You've just lost your Facebook (or Twitter) account. Now, some cyber con artist is out there using your profile to contact your friends with their scam. Now your friends are irritated with you, your boss is suspicious of you, and you have to rebuild your whole darn page!

Not fun. If you see a suspicious link, delete it and send a message via email or text message to your friend and warn them they've been hacked.

Hidden URLs

As a regular Twitter poster with my own blog, I always use TinyUrl.com to shorten my links. Plenty of legitimate businesspeople do this to get around Twitter's character limit. However, when clicking links, it's best to err on the side of caution.

When you receive a new follower on Twitter, check out their previous updates. Do they all look like SPAM? Do they follow thousands of people yet have few followers of their own? Is their profile picture worthy of a Victoria Secret or Maxim catalog cover? Beware. Clicking on their links could take you to a website where spyware or malware might be downloaded onto your computer without you knowing.

The "Sick Baby" Scam

This one is sick alright. The "sick baby" scam works like this: A "friend" posts a photograph of a baby or child looking ill. There's a caption beneath it that reads, "Little Jimmy has cancer. Click this link to donate \$1 to help him and his family. Every little bit counts!"

Your heart goes out to this helpless little baby and you click on the link, whip out your bank card and donate some money. What you don't know is the money isn't going to help some dying child; it's going straight to the bank account of a con artist!

A variation on this scam is the Facebook or Twitter share request. Instead of sending money to help the "sick baby", you're asked to share the photo with everyone you know because each share "earns 5 cents" toward his cause.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Facebook, Twitter nor any social networking website will donate money based on how many times something is emailed, shared, or tweeted. This is always a scam to get more readers and reel in more unsuspecting victims.

Scam Giveaways

Whether it's an email scam or a social networking scam, there are some dead giveaways when it comes to recognizing them before they get you:

Unsolicited Emails

One of the best ways to avoid email scams is to delete unsolicited emails. Legitimate companies will never send you pertinent information over email.

Promises of Money or Prizes

Any email or social networking link that promises free money or prizes should be looked at with very careful scrutiny. These are almost always scams.

Requests for Donations

Whenever there's a national disaster, con artists have a field day sending bogus requests for donations. Instead of donating through email to an unknown charity, visit legitimate websites such as the Red Cross to give to a cause.

Request Sensitive Personal Information (Bank Account Number, Social Security Number)

Bar none, any person who sends you an email asking for sensitive information is up to no good. No matter what they promise you, mark the email as SPAM and move on.

Asks You to Follow a Link to a Website and Log In

This is a big one. Whenever you receive an unsolicited email asking you to 'click here', even if it sounds like a legitimate company, beware. This is likely a scam. The same goes for social networking website links that take you 'back' to Facebook or Twitter. It's just a look-a-like site designed to steal your information.

Final Word

If you've fallen for a few of these online scams and hoaxes, you're not dumb and you're certainly not alone. Online con artists are very clever. They use some seriously underhanded methods to get information and money from unsuspecting people.

Young online surfers are easy targets too. Older children and teenagers spend more than half their time surfing social networking sites and using email. It's important for parents and caregivers to not only monitor their activity, but to warn them of online scams, especially those geared at younger surfers, such as social networking quizzes and photo scams.

Arm yourself with knowledge; warn your kids, and they'll be one less victim of an online con artist.

Have you been the victim of an online scam? What did you do about it?

About Me

From birth to the age of twenty-two, I was constantly ill. It took a naturopathic physician to finally diagnose me with gluten intolerance. In 2002, there was little information available about this condition, so I did hours of Internet research myself.

This research led to a passion for helping others living with similar conditions. I would recommend the gluten-free diet to anyone with chronic digestive problems or autoimmune disease.

In 2010, I started my own website, [I Told You I Was Sick](#), which is dedicated to helping others with "mystery symptoms" learn their possible causes and natural ways to heal. Soon after, I took paid writing opportunities and built both my experience and my client list from there.

For the past five years, I have written hundreds of articles on natural health, wellness, fitness, mental health, nutrition, developmental disorders, and food allergies. I have also written pieces on career, beauty, the Internet, gardening, insurance, and spirituality.

Although I have done social media in the past, I've since turned my full attention to research, writing, and editing only. I use this skill-set to create professional pieces my clients are proud to publish.

English is my first and only language.

What I Can Do for You

If you're looking for 100% original, well-researched content for your website, magazine, newsletter, or blog, I have the experience it takes to provide it.

[Contact me](#) for:

- Articles
- Newsletters
- Autoresponders
- Blog Posts
- Website Content
- E-Books
- Ghostwriting
- Editing
- Product Descriptions
- Product Reviews
- Sales Pages

Testimonials

"Jaime A. Heidel has been a welcome addition to our group of natural health authors. Her writing ability and knowledge of natural health are much appreciated." - **Tony Isaacs - The Best Years in Life**

"Jaime is truly a one-of-a-kind professional. Any writing or editing tasks I've assigned her have been completed quickly and with great attention to detail. Moreover, she grasps the material quickly and turns out superlative product. I look forward to working with her on many projects." - **Amy Susan Crohn, Marketing Communications Consultant**

"Jaime has been my go-to content writer for the past two years now. Her attention to detail and research results in content that is high-quality and very engaging for my readers. She understands the fundamentals of writing for the web and her content is testament to that. I plan to keep her as my go-to writer for the unforeseeable future. You will not be disappointed with her work!" - **Benjamin Weiser - Freelance Affiliate Marketer**

"Jaime Heidel is a big asset to Alignlife's Health Secrets publications. She has the rare talent of being able to construct a mental framework for each of her writings which she then fills in with details. This makes all of her articles full of information presented in a way that is easily understood, to the point, compelling, and highly believable. Though she is unquestionably professional, Jaime's writings portray the energy and zest of youth." - **Barbara Minton, Editor - Alignlife Health Secrets**

"Jaime has been writing for my site MediMushrooms for the past year. She has a background in wellness and brings wonderful dimension to her work. She is efficient and has fabulous initiative. I would highly recommend Jaime." - **Fran Fainman of MediMushrooms.co.za**

"Jaime has been doing the writing and social media promotion for 2 of my major websites, WomensHealthNet.org, and Love-Solutions.com. She has strong knowledge of SEO keyword placement and is effective at creating content that attracts organic traffic and encourages sharing. Her creative interaction on social media platforms draws steady traffic and customers to each of my sites. I'd strongly recommend her!" - **Dave Rich - Founder and CEO of New Age Alternatives**

"Jaime has consistently written compelling, reader-friendly content for our website. She has good attention to detail, knowledge of SEO word placement, and a fast turn-around. We're happy to recommend her services!" - **Patrick and Jessica Coffey - Health Scams Exposed**

"I have worked with Jaime on a number of writing projects. Jaime is an excellent writer, and a great person. She is a pleasure to work with." - **Dr. Craig A. Maxwell - AskDrMaxwell.com**

"Jaime is one of my best writers. She researches her topics well and writes in a way that an average person can understand. This is a good skill because this requires translating material written for doctors and professionals to a fun article written for everyone." - **Satish Lohani - Health on a Budget**

"Jaime has contributed two excellent articles to our site. Both articles are interesting and informative. I did not have to make one edit on either article, which is truly rare! I look forward to working with Jaime again in the future and would recommend her to anyone who has need of well-written articles." - **Bill Kline - Looking for Clues**

"Jaime is a terrific writer - she always over-delivers in delightful ways. She is a conscientious communicator, and she has a fresh, creative, and engaging writing style that perfectly suits my websites. She crafts her articles with thoughtful intelligence. She also has an intuitive knack for giving me what I didn't even know I wanted, whether its formatting details, or great content...I highly recommend her!" - **Zara Baker - Holidays in Portugal**

"I have had the pleasure of working with Jaime Heidel for the past several months and I would highly recommend her as a freelance writer. Whatever topic I assign Jaime always delivers well written and researched articles in a timely manner. More often than not her articles arrive before the due date. Jaime is a solid writer and extremely easy to work with." - **Annette Richmond, Founder and Executive Editor of Career-Intelligence.com**

"LifeHealth Science has worked with Jaime on three projects with extremely good results. The quality of research provided was excellent and the copy was compelling. She has helped with sales literature, our company story, and web site copy. The service and quality Jaime provided was excellent". - **Kent Adams, CEO of LifeHealth Science, LLC**

[How Can I Help You?](#)