



Diet product claims raise red flags

What do Pinocchio and a number of the "too good to be true" dietary supplement companies have in common? A lot, the Federal Trade Commission and the Food and Drug Administration believe. Within the last month, the agencies, as part of Operation Cure All, have charged several supplement companies with making false and unsubstantiated health claims about their products.

Question: What is a false and unsubstantiated claim?

Answer: Under the Dietary Supplement, Health and Education Act, also known as DSHEA, dietary supplements cannot make ANY claim to prevent or cure diseases. The only claims allowed are known as "structure-function" claims. For example: Calcium is necessary for strong bones.

Q: What types of claims are being made?

A: Many claims are blatantly false and in many cases outrageous. Our Jan. 22 "Health Options" column listed some of the most ridiculous we had heard. These

include statements that coral calcium cures more than 90 percent of all diseases, including cancer, heart disease and multiple sclerosis, within two years. A product called Seasilver claims to be a safe treatment for more than 650 diseases, including AIDS, Lyme disease, cancer and diabetes. It also claims to promote weight loss.

Q: Who has the FTC filed complaints or charges against?

A: The most recent list includes Americaloe Inc. products, Antibetic Pancreas Tonic, Bela and Jason Berkes, Braswell enterprise, Chitoplex, Coral Calcium Supreme, Council on Natural Nutrition, Deonna Enterprises Inc., G.H.3, G.H.3 Romanian Youth Formula, Gero Vita, Glenn Braswell, Kevin Trudeau, Lung Support Formula, Robert Barefoot, Ron Tepper, Seasilver USA products, Shop America (USA), Testrex and Therapeutics.

Because these companies and products have been promoted in television infomercials and on the Internet so of-

ten, they take on the facade of truth. To make life more complicated, a number of slick advertisements take on the form of health magazines. The FTC has named New Life Nutrition Magazine as one of these.

Q: Is it true that Operation Cure All is another government and pharmaceutical conspiracy to remove consumers' freedom of choice?

A: Many Web sites allege this, but the Council for Responsible Nutrition, a leading trade association for the dietary supplement business, has been encouraging the FTC and FDA to take action.

Q: How can a consumer know what is safe?

A: Being skeptical is important, especially if the promoters will benefit financially from their advice to you.

Here are our two rules of thumb:

>> If it sounds too good to be true, just walk away.

>> If it sounds plausible, then you have a lot of homework to do to keep from being conned.

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