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EXTRA

The independent newsletter that reports vitamin, mineral, and food therapies

Don't Over-Regulate Supplements

By Jack Challem

The number of published, credible scientific studies on the health benefits of vitamins, minerals, other nutrients, and herbs continues to grow rapidly. Thousands of studies are published each year in medical journals. To get a sense of this huge body of research, you need only search for such terms as "antioxidant" or "vitamin E" in the free PubMed database (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>).

Yet as the research on vitamins and other micronutrients gets better, the attacks on supplements seem to get stronger. Over the past year, we have seen repeated "official" attacks on supplements. A few of these attacks have been justified, such as against companies peddling breast-enlarging supplements. But most of the attacks have followed a scatter-gun approach, arguing that if one supplement (such as ephedra) is potentially dangerous, then all other supplements might also be dangerous and in need of more governmental regulation.

Such a broad attack recently appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. One article questioned the benefits of St. John's wort, and another focused on the questionable internet advertising of herbal products. But both articles paled in comparison to a vicious editorial by Catherine D. DeAngelis, MD, condemning the supposed lack of regulation governing supplements.

The crux of DeAngelis's argument was nothing less than a preposterous idea: "Because many dietary supplements have or promote biological activity, they must be considered active drugs and regulated as such."

By this definition, everything you and I eat – breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks – should be regulated as drugs. The reason is that all foods are biologically active. Foods affect our weight, our hormones, and our levels of neurotransmitters, and they are as biologically active as any drug.

If you eat broccoli, a healthy food, you're obtaining vitamin C, which promotes normal cell growth and differentiation, immunity, and numerous

essential enzymatic functions.

Junk foods are biologically active as well. Ice-cream cones, soft drinks, and pastries boost your glucose and insulin levels, which will promote body fat and increase your risk of diabetes and heart disease. If you apply DeAngelis's argument, all of these foods should be regulated as drugs.

I don't think anyone wants to carry regulation quite that far. And in truth, supplements are already regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, but they are regulated fairly as foods, not drugs. After all, supplements are food components, regardless of whether people use them to round out their diets, lower their risk of disease, or to treat disease.

The real problem is not a lack of regulation of dietary supplements, and more laws are not the solution to the occasional sleazy product. Rather, the answer is better enforcement of existing laws.

Overregulation of supplements would deprive you of many of the supplements you freely choose to take and which you depend on for your health. A better approach would be to fund enforcement of existing provisions of food and drug law through the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, which already allows the FDA to seize mislabeled or harmful supplements and the Federal Trade Commission to fine companies guilty of deceptive advertising.

Right now, the Senate is weighing S.722, known as the Dietary Supplement Safety Act of 2003 and also as the "Durbin Bill." This bill amounts to unnecessary and overregulatory legislation. I urge you to call your two senators today (via the Capitol switchboard, 1-202-224-3121) and leave a message that you *oppose* S.722. In addition, ask your senators to *support* the "DSHEA Full Implementation and Enforcement Act of 2003," S.1538, which will fund reasonable enforcement efforts. You can also email your senators through <http://www.senate.gov/>

Action items: Ask both of your senators to (1) *oppose* S.722 and (2) *support* S.1538. □

A Review of Recent Health Books

Part of this December supplement to *The Nutrition Reporter*TM focuses on recently published nutrition books. To order any of these books, go to www.amazon.com, www.powells.com, www.bn.com, or your local bookstore.

Atkins for Life, by Robert C. Atkins, MD. (St. Martin's Press, 2003, \$24.95) Shortly before his accidental and untimely death, Dr. Atkins published this remarkable book. *Atkins for Life* reads and feels more like a user-friendly workbook for following the high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet Atkins popularized over 30 years. However, the book is anything but a rehash of his earlier books. Rather, the diet plans are more balanced – higher in nonstarchy vegetables – than the first Atkins diet. For someone who wants to lose weight and keep it off, this is an excellent starting point, considering that several recent studies have confirmed that eating more protein and fewer carbs is a sound way to lose weight and improve blood markers of cardiovascular disease. —JC

The Inflammation Syndrome, by Jack Challem. (John Wiley & Sons, 2003, \$24.95) Two events have helped focus attention on the role of chronic inflammation in disease. One, medicine has quietly refined heart disease as an inflammatory disorder of blood vessels. Two, blood tests for high-sensitivity C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation, have become inexpensive and relatively common. *The Inflammation Syndrome* connects many of the dots in what often seemed like unrelated inflammatory diseases, even some diseases that had not until recently been considered inflammatory. For example, such inflammatory diseases as arthritis, irritable bowel disease, and periodontitis increase the risk of developing heart disease. This book focuses on 20 common inflammatory conditions, with specific nutrition advice and recipes, and it solidly addresses how eating habits either promote or prevent chronic inflammation. —ML

The Allergy and Asthma Cure, by Fred Pescatore, MD. (John Wiley & Sons, 2003, \$24.95) This book zeroes in on the dietary and lifestyle causes of allergies and asthma and makes a good companion to *The Inflammation Syndrome*. Pescatore is an exceptional nutritionally oriented physician with medical practices in New York City and Dallas. Although he has focused on treating obesity in children, he also recognizes how diets high in processed foods set the stage for allergies and asthma. He describes how to identify food sensitivities, which can aggravate allergies and

asthma. Pescatore's program includes a blend of diet, supplements, and medications to control and reverse allergies and asthma. Although medications typically treat only symptoms, sometimes they are necessary in asthma, which can have sudden life-threatening reactions. —JC

The Modern Nutritional Diseases and How to Prevent Them, by Alice Ottoboni, PhD and Fred Ottoboni, PhD. (Vincente Books, 2002, \$29.95) This book provides an important and often overlooked historical context of our current dietary and health problems. Over the past 100 years, foods have undergone an unprecedented level of processing and refining. Many wholesome foods, once common in the diet, are rarely eaten except by a relatively small number of conscientious people. At the same time, the modern diet has become saturated with highly processed, high-calorie foods, leading to skyrocketing levels of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Ottoboni and Ottoboni rightly attack the conventional high-carb heart-healthy diet as being based on faulty science, with the consequence being an increase (not a decrease) in the incidence of degenerative diseases. —JC

The Magnesium Factor, by Mildred S. Seelig, MD, and Andrea Rosanoff, PhD. (Avery, 2003, \$15.95) With the dairy industry promoting calcium, other minerals, such as magnesium, often fall below our radar. Seelig is one of the world's foremost experts on magnesium, and she argues persuasively that most people require far more magnesium than they consume. The mineral is a natural calcium blocker and can reduce blood pressure and the risk of cardiovascular disease. Low magnesium intake is also intertwined in many other diseases, including obesity and diabetes. This is an excellent book on magnesium. The only drawback might be that it creates another miracle nutrient, when we all need many nutrients for health. —JC

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