

Tuesday Minute Transcript

This Week's Topic

The Dangers Of Discount Store Supplements



"If they purchase supplements from a discount store, consumer reports show it's likely they are not getting what they pay for."

Why can't I buy my supplements from a discount store? Do I have to get them from my clinician? How many times have you heard patients say this to you or your staff? One of the realities difficult for our patients to understand is that all supplements are not created equal.

I think it is important for us to inform our patients. If they purchase supplements from a discount store, consumer reports show it's likely they are not getting what they pay for. Any patient, but especially those with a health crisis, should get their nutrients from a reputable source... you.

Start a file and create a professional looking notebook using page protectors and insert reports like the one I am about to share. Have it available to use with patients when the topic of cost and nutrient sources come up.



This report comes from ConsumerLab.com in their November 9, 2010 posting. This is a subscription service that sends watchdog information about supplements. It costs about \$30.00 per year and to me it is well worth it. They give individual company names but that is not the issue. Personally, I am interested in the trend.

They analyzed 10 different forms of valerian root and found only 3 met label claims. Herbal remedies have

many properties or chemical components that have health benefits. However there is usually one group of compounds that has been given credit for its effectiveness. "Valerenic Acids" are the group of sesquiterpenes that have been given credit for the anti-anxiety effects of valerian root. So ConsumerLab used valerenic acid and related compounds as the set of chemical markers to determine potency.

They also looked for the heavy metals, lead and cadmium. Here's what they found: 5 of the 10 tested did not meet label claims. They had levels of 0% (yes, 0%), 26.7%, 36.8%, 57.1% and 82.5 % of what the label claimed. 3 of the 10 products had measurable amounts of lead anywhere from 1.2 mcg to 3.5 mcg. In this investigation they did not find cadmium. However prior testing by ConsumerLab.com has found the heavy metals lead and cadmium in valerian supplements.

Cadmium is a carcinogen and a kidney toxin. Lead can impair mental functioning and may affect blood pressure. The amounts of cadmium and lead in supplements tend to be small when present and will unlikely cause toxicity. But heavy metals "accumulate over time" due to our food supply and dietary deficiency of the opposing minerals that displace them. And there's a small safety margin between exposure in the normal diet and levels that can produce deleterious effects. Here's the point: heavy metals are a common problem but few manufacturers are looking for them.

Let me take it to the next level of testing illustrated with a current "insider" story. Right now there is a worldwide shortage of curcumin due to all the positive health benefits. Food manufactures are starting to put curcumin in designer foods to give them a little extra sizzle.

Biotics Research Corporation has used 2 suppliers in the past but demand has forced them to look for other suppliers. In looking for a third supplier, Biotics found one that provided material that was free of heavy metals; but when they checked it for solvents found out that it contained a carcinogenic chemical that

was nearly 30 times the allowed limit, 30 times.

Different from root products, extracts or standardized concentrates by their nature have been "extracted" and, as a result, have less heavy metal content. But suppliers have to use something in the extraction process. Sometimes it's water, sometimes it's alcohol, but sometimes stronger chemical solvents have to be used to separate and then concentrate the phytochemicals from the plant. Sometimes those solvents are not healthy above a certain level and must be removed. If they are not removed, problems can arise.

Here's a question we should ask, "Who's checking for those solvents?" If manufactures are not checking for heavy metals which are relatively easy to spot, do you think they are checking for solvents? Very, very few companies are screening for solvents like Biotics. Keep in mind that solvent testing is not required by GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices). Biotics doesn't do it because they have to; they do it because it's the right thing to do.

I use and recommend Biotics products because I don't want to waste a second thinking about whether my patient is ever in danger of accumulating heavy metals, if solvents may be harming them, if the active ingredient is in the product, or if the tablet will dissolve? And if we communicate these ideas to our patients, they can only benefit. Patients can obtain greater levels of optimal health because you provide products that are safe and they work. Let's coach our patients regularly and "open their eyes" to the documented facts about nutritional supplements.

Thanks for reading this week's edition. I'll see you next Tuesday.