

Supplements with Ephedra or Steroid Hormone Are Illegal for Minors, Says California Legislature

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In August 2002, the California legislature passed a bill on the sale and labeling of dietary supplements that contain ephedra and steroid hormone precursors. SB 1884 requires specific warning language, the FDA MedWatch phone number, and a notice that the product is not for use by individuals under the age of 18 years, on the label of all dietary supplements containing ephedrine group alkaloids (ephedra) or steroid hormone precursors, such as androstenedione and DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone). The bill makes it a misdemeanor for any manufacturer, wholesaler, retailer or other person to sell, transfer or otherwise furnish a dietary supplement containing ephedrine group alkaloids or steroid hormone precursors to persons under 18.

At press time, the bill is expected to be signed into law.

This action comes on the heels of a number of deaths and adverse effects attributed to the use of supplements containing ephedra and anabolic steroids. The adverse side-effects of supplements containing ephedra and anabolic steroids account for 17 percent of all adverse events reported from the use of dietary supplements - the highest percentage of any supplements. Ephedra-containing supplements have been associated with sudden death, stroke, seizures, and heart attacks, even in young persons. They commonly cause nervousness; anxiety; insomnia; palpitations; arrhythmias; and other troublesome side-effects.

Sources

1. National Nutritional Foods Association announcement, Sept. 5, 2002.
2. MedWatch database (www.fda.gov/medwatch).

Americans May Soon Claim Dietary Supplement Purchases As a Tax Deduction

Senators Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) introduced the Dietary Supplement Tax Fairness Act (S.1330) to Congress on August 2, 2001. The bill would put self-care products, such as dietary supplements, on a par with other medical care items, in that it would provide an IRS deduction for consumers who purchase them (when their total medical expenses exceed 7.5 percent of adjusted gross income). Premiums paid for insurance covering supplement purchases would also be deductible.

Senator Harkin called the bill an effort to "advance sound health care policy." He added: "Our current policy is unfair and is failing to take full advantage of the potential to improve health and hold down health care costs through preventive health care practices available to consumers."

The scientific panel of the Office of Dietary Supplement Research deems the legislation a valuable tool for the public health community by increasing the consumption of "disease-fighting phytochemicals."

Senators Harkin and Hatch have been highly instrumental throughout the last decade in helping to create awareness of the scientific evidence indicating that nutritional supplementation may be a useful intervention in the prevention and/or management of many chronic degenerative diseases. Through their efforts, the Office of Alternative Medicine was established in 1991 at the National Institutes of Health (later the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine - NCCAM). The two senators also introduced the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, which has greatly improved consumer access to nutritional supplements and to the scientific evidence to support their safe and responsible use. In the words of Sen. Harkin, "Consumers need ready access to high-quality, reliable information. They need it and they are thirsting for it. And if it is done right, it will improve health, extend lives and reduce health care costs by keeping people healthy."

It is also interesting to note that the budget for the NCCAM rose from \$3 million to \$50 million in four years. For the fiscal year 2000, its budget was \$68.3 million; when added to the other research initiatives undertaken by other institutions and centers in the U.S., the total complementary and alternative medicine investment in research and related activities was approximately \$161 million for the fiscal year 2001.

Sources

1. *NNFA Today* 2002;16(8).
2. Dietary Supplement Information Bureau, 2002.

Please take time to listen to Dr. Meschino's interviews at www.chiroweb.com/audio/meschino. The subjects of the first three are: *Combining Traditional, Complementary and Natural Intervention, The Benefits of Melatonin, and Using Natural Remedies to Manage Women's Health Issues*. Each interview is packed with important information available to you and your patients. There is a link on the directory page for your feedback.

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