

Coral Calcium Infomercial Under Attack by the FTC, FDA

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If your patients have come into your office recently asking you about the merits of the dietary supplement known as coral calcium they learned about while watching the frequently televised infomercial starring Kevin Trudeau and Robert Barefoot, you're not alone. Moreover, fielding their questions is very difficult, simply because scientific studies involving this type of calcium for the treatment or prevention of disease are scarce. (A search of medical, biomedical and alternative health journals turns up no available studies on coral calcium and disease states.) One article on this subject indicates that coral calcium is nothing more than an expensive form of calcium carbonate (Schryver, T. Spotlight on coral calcium. *Prevention*, Jan. 2003, vol. 55, issue 1:65).

On June 10, 2003, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced it was charging the marketers of a dietary supplement, "Coral Calcium Supreme," with making false and unsubstantiated claims about the product's health benefits. In a complaint filed in federal district court, the FTC alleged that Kevin Trudeau; Robert Barefoot; Shop America (USA); LLC; and Deonna Enterprises, Inc., violated FTC regulations by claiming falsely and without substantiation, that Coral Calcium Supreme can treat or cure cancer and other diseases, such as multiple sclerosis and heart disease. The FTC charged that these and other claims go far beyond existing scientific evidence regarding the recognized health benefits of calcium.

In concert with this action, the FTC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are sending strong warning letters to website operators who market coral calcium products and claim that coral calcium is an effective treatment or cure for cancer and/or other diseases. The FTC states that it is aware of no competent and reliable scientific evidence supporting such claims, and that such unsupported claims are unlawful. Product manufacturers or marketers are obligated by law to submit scientific substantiation for the health claims they make to the FTC and FDA, respectively, with regard to their advertising and product labeling statements.

The FTC states that it authorizes filing a complaint when it has "reason to believe" the law has been or is being violated, and it appears to the commission that a proceeding is in the best public interest. (The complaint is not a finding or a ruling that the defendant actually has violated the law.) The case mentioned here will be decided by the court (www.ftc.gov/opa/2003/06/trudeau.htm).

In a review article published in the *Townsend Letter to Doctors and Patients* (June 2003), Jule Klotter addressed some of the health claims mentioned in Mr. Barefoot's book, *Barefoot on Coral Calcium: An Elixir of Life?* In his book, Barefoot draws on research (usually without references) to promote his Okinawan coral calcium. The Okinawans are a long-lived and healthy people, according to a 25-year study headed by Dr. Makoto Suzuki. Okinawa has the highest percentage of verifiable 100-year-olds in the world. They are healthy, and have sharp minds. Their diets consist of fresh produce and grains, and regular servings of soy products and fish. Exercise is a way of life for the young and old alike, and

citizens maintain a positive spiritual attitude and a low-stress lifestyle.

As pointed out by Klotter, all of these factors are related to disease prevention and longevity, but nowhere in Barefoot's book does he present evidence to show that the intake of coral calcium is among the important factors that account for the legendary health and longevity of the natives. As pointed out by Klotter in his review of Barefoot's book, "Although Mr. Barefoot repeatedly states that mineral intake may not be the only factor in the health and longevity of Okinawans, the book continually emphasizes the health benefits of calcium, specifically Okinawan coral calcium." An analysis of Okinawan marine coral has been shown to contain calcium oxide; magnesium oxide; silicon oxide; strontium oxide; iron oxide; and aluminum oxide. Aluminum has been implicated in illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease, as Klotter points out.

After reviewing the scientific arguments and available studies pertaining to the use of coral calcium for the prevention of disease and legendary longevity, Klotter concludes, "It is indeed questionable that this widely-touted supplement is an elixir of life."

Concerning the recommendation of calcium supplements to patients, I strongly suggest you review the recent review article I wrote for *Dynamic Chiropractic*, "Calcium: Requirements, Bioavailable Forms, Physiology and Clinical Aspects," accessible at: www.chiroweb.com/archives/20/18/23.html.

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Please take time to listen to Dr. Meschino's informative interviews at www.chiroweb.com/audio/meschino. The titles of the latest interviews are: "Selenium and its Influence on Cancer"; "Benefits and Clinical Application of Alternative Medicine and Acupuncture"; and "Research and Strategies Related to Eye Health."

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