

# ARE HERBAL PRODUCTS AND SUPPLEMENTS SAFE?



A lot of folks have the misconception that “natural” remedies such as herbs are safer than prescription medications. Unfortunately, there is no FDA testing of herbs and supplements and many of these products are completely unsafe. The University of Guelph published a paper in 2013 detailing their findings of safety and quality problems in 44 herbal products, obtained from 12 different companies. The authors found that 60% of the products contained DNA from plant species not listed on the label, some of which were quite harmful.

Feverfew was a common extra ingredient. Feverfew can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and swelling in the mouth. It is also addictive, so if you stop giving it withdrawal leads to rebound headaches and muscle pain.

Many compounds examined in the study contained none of the herb listed on the label but instead contained cheaper substitutes. For example, one product labeled as St. John’s wort contained only senna, an herbal laxative, which would thus produce diarrhea in unsuspecting consumers.

An expose called “Supplements and Safety,” broadcast on Frontline on Jan. 19<sup>th</sup> of 2016, led to New York’s attorney General to issue cease-and-desist letters to 13 makers of Devil’s Claw products marketed for arthritis that contained no Devil’s Claw. The U.S. attorney general recently directed four major retailers – Walmart, Target, Walgreen’s and GNC – to halt the sale of certain herbal supplements after DNA testing failed to detect the plant materials listed on the labels of the majority of products tested, and also found DNA from contaminants not listed on the labels. Several Echinacea products were found to contain mostly rice and buttercup DNA, if they contained any plant DNA at all. Target’s valerian root contained garlic and wild carrot but no Valerian. Walgreen’s St. John’s wort consisted of garlic, rice and the house plant Dracaena. Walmart’s ginkgo biloba had only dracaena, mustard, wheat and radish DNA.

So far, there has been no comparable large study on herbal or supplement products marketed for animals. Consumerlabs.com has done testing on a variety of supplements, including glucosamine and fish oil products marketed for both animals and people. Like the Guelph study, they found that many, many products did not contain what was stated on the label. Nature’s Way and GNC have announced implementation of new testing standards but for most of these types of products there is absolutely no guarantee that you are getting what you are paying for.

Look for the logo of the National Animal Supplement Council or ask us for a recommendation for any of these products before you buy.

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