

GAO Submits Congressional Testimony Entitled "Herbal Dietary Supplements: Examples of Deceptive or Questionable Marketing Practices and Potentially Dangerous Advice"

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On May 26, 2010, the GAO submitted testimony to the [U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging](#), entitled "Herbal Dietary Supplements: Examples of Deceptive or Questionable Marketing Practices and Potentially Dangerous Advice." The testimony was requested by the Special Committee on Aging, because "recent studies have shown that use of herbal dietary supplements...by the elderly within the United States has increased substantially."

According to the report, "the GAO was asked to determine (1) whether sellers of herbal dietary supplements are using deceptive or questionable marketing practices and (2) whether selected herbal dietary supplements are contaminated with harmful substances."

The GAO concluded that "certain dietary supplements commonly used by the elderly were deceptively or questionably marketed," with claims the supplements could treat, prevent, or cure conditions such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol or Alzheimer's disease —claims that, under the Federal Food Drug and Cosmetic Act, and related FDA implementing regulations, are not permitted for use in the labeling or marketing of dietary supplements. The GAO referred the names of companies that made these claims to FDA and the FTC "for appropriate action."

The GAO's testimony also states that while the GAO "found trace amounts of at least one potentially hazardous contaminant in 37 of the 40 herbal dietary supplements products tested," no contaminants were found "in amounts considered to pose an acute toxicity hazard." The GAO noted that "the levels of heavy metals found do not exceed any FDA or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations governing dietary supplements or their raw ingredients, and FDA and EPA officials did not express concern regarding any immediate negative health consequences from consuming [the tested] supplements."

Click here for [more information about the GAO's study](#), including a full copy of the testimony.