



NEWSLETTER

SAFETY, CRIME PREVENTION, AND
HEALTHY LIVING FOR OLDER ADULTS

- Fall 2024 -



Be Skeptical About Dietary Supplements

By Pam Lewis, Triad Volunteer

Lately I've been noticing ads for supplements such as Prevagen and Neuriva. One features a kindly pharmacist who just loves telling people how Prevagen has increased his mental sharpness and implies it can work for you, too. I recall that a doctor once recommended I take a fish oil supplement for general health, which I did until I woke up one morning with a nose bleed. Not severe, but it rattled me, and I learned that bleeding can be a side effect of fish oil. Recommendation from a doctor ... rosy promises of ads ... unwanted side effects ... what is going on? I decided to learn more.

There are hundreds of dietary supplements for all kinds of ailments, from toenail fungus and hair loss to heart health and digestion. Annual sales are in the billions of dollars, with the highest rates of use among adults over 60.

A dietary supplement is defined as any product that supplements the nutrients you get from food. This includes vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals (such as echinacea and turmeric), amino acids (such as glutamine and lysine), enzymes, and probiotics.



Natural ingredients

Supplement makers often tout natural ingredients, like fish oil, but "natural" does not mean "harmless." Some mushrooms are poisonous, as are many plants or their parts. Many toxic chemicals occur naturally as well, such as arsenic.

Another issue is that supplements often contain ingredients in isolation and in much higher concentrations than

occurs in nature. For example, curcumin, an active ingredient in turmeric and claimed to be beneficial for inflammation, is not naturally available (in turmeric as a spice) in the concentrations found in turmeric supplements. More does not necessarily

mean better and could be risky, according to an expert at Johns Hopkins. Finally, there can be side effects, interactions (with food, drugs, and other supplements), and long-term use problems, just as there are for drugs.

Regulation

The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) does not approve supplements for safety and efficacy before marketing. This is required for prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and includes looking at side effects, interactions (with food, drugs, and other supplements) and long-term use. But not so for supplements. Even the accuracy of a supplement label regarding the identity and quantity of ingredients does not have to be approved pre-market. This is like closing the barn door after the horse has escaped.

It is not a total Wild West scenario out there as the DSHEA (Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994) sets forth regulations to address the explosion of supplements in recent times. DSHEA gives the FDA authority to monitor the marketplace (which includes manufacturing practices and labeling), and the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) monitors advertising, which must support claims with "high quality, randomized, controlled clinical trials" (good luck with that, as this is rare for supplements). A disclaimer is

required on supplement packaging: "These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease."

Again, this monitoring occurs **after** supplements have gone on the market, and complaints/reports of harm are often what leads to action. If you are thinking this is not enough, I agree.

Research evidence

Instead of research, anecdotal evidence such as testimonials, like the one by the benevolent pharmacist, are often used by supplement makers. These endorsements should be considered the least convincing form of evidence since they may not be representative or even true. Copywriters,

however, can make them compelling.

Sometimes research evidence is cited, but it is often not the high-quality research the FTC would like, nor does the FTC have the resources to monitor every product. Not all published research is of high quality. A research study could be published

in a magazine or a blog in some remote corner of the internet (maybe something like *Uncle Joe's Pill Quarterly*). It could be just one small study or a poorly designed one or done only with animals. The results of such studies do not provide credible evidence. The FDA *does* require clinical trials pre-market for prescription drugs,



which are usually published in reputable scientific journals with peer review. Peer reviewers are experts on both the relevant field (arthritis, brain health ...) and on how to design and execute high quality research. They determine if the research should be published.

You could argue that supplements are modern-day snake oil. Instead of strange liquids in glass bottles we have pills and powders wrapped in slick packaging and vague language with phrases like “studies have shown,” “clinically tested,” “evidence based,” and “doctor recommended.” How many doctors? How was it tested? Vague language is also used to describe the results, e.g., “improved memory,” “digestive aid,” “boosts immune system,” “supports brain health.” How much is a “boost”? How was this measured?

What you can do to make wise decisions about supplements

Given that we are basically on our own, here are a few things you can do:

- ▶ Search online for the supplement + “scam,” “review” or “complaint.”
- ▶ Search online for the ingredients on reputable sites like the Cleveland Clinic or the Mayo Clinic.
- ▶ Check the FDA’s Dietary Supplement Ingredient Directory - <https://bit.ly/3Uyus6H>, a website launched in 2023 with information about ingredients and any actions taken regarding them.
- ▶ Check the label for third-party certifications, such as USP (United States Pharmacopeia), Consumer Lab and NSF International. None are as good as FDA approval, but you may get some very basic information,

e.g., that it is not contaminated with toxic chemicals or bacteria. (See their websites for exactly what they certify).

- ▶ Check relevant professional websites to see if they recommend the supplement.
- ▶ Search PubMed (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>) to see if any high quality research has been done on the supplement.

Placebo effect

Finally, let’s not forget the *placebo effect*, that fascinating phenomenon that when you think something is working, it works. Particularly when you’re paying \$30 or more per month, it may be easy to convince yourself that something works, regardless of the truth. You don’t want to think you’re throwing away your money.

Conclusion

Some supplements may indeed do what they claim. However, in many cases there is no convincing evidence, and there are serious concerns about not just efficacy but safety as well. It’s best to be informed and skeptical.

Sources:

Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS - part of NIH) <https://ods.od.nih.gov>

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH - part of NIH) <https://nccam.nih.gov>

How Fake Science Sells Wellness - New York Times- updated August 2023 <https://archive.is/lqN9G>

Johns Hopkins Medicine – Wellness and Prevention <http://hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention>

Ireland for Seniors

By Rick Larson, Triad Volunteer

Some of you may remember a report I did a year ago about my aborted trip to Ireland when United canceled my flight at the last minute. I wrote about passenger rights when it comes to airlines.

Since that disturbing experience, our travel company came through with a make-up tour of Ireland at a reduced rate and we accepted. In fact, we just got back and here's what we learned about international travel as a senior citizen.

First, we discovered that flying is no longer comfortable or fun. Airports such as O'Hare are huge, overcrowded and confusing. (The word "zoo" comes to mind.) Travelers endure long walks, long lines and long waits as you're processed for your trip.

Once aboard your flight, it's batten down the hatches. It takes seven hours to fly to Ireland. We were squeezed into tiny, narrow seats with no knee room. Passengers can buy more comfortable seats but they cost plenty, so we held onto our money and simply endured.

When we landed in Dublin, all bleary eyed, we still had to negotiate customs, exchange money and get to the hotel. The flight plus five hours difference in time zones makes those tasks seem monumental. The time change also makes getting a good night's sleep sketchy.

Ireland is a nation that drives on the other side of the road. It's very disconcerting even if you're not driving. We found that even crossing the street can be dangerous when you look the wrong way and step off the curb.

We spent many hours on the tour bus riding from town to town. But part of our days included walking tours of the city, and parks and leisure strolls in the evening. A few of the hikes were physically challenging. One woman lost her balance on a hike and broke her arm. The sidewalks and paths were often uneven. Getting into walking shape before you leave makes good sense.

During our tour, we changed hotels five times. Each time, we had to relearn the location of the elevator, bar, and restaurant, and figure out the switches, TV controls and, most important, the shower settings in our room. A wrong turn on a shower knob can result in a blast of icy water or, more serious, getting scalded.

One more thing. Don't forget your meds. Bring extra in the original bottles. And if you need medical assistance while you're overseas, most local clinics will welcome you. Many countries, unlike ours, have socialized



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Emergency Scams Instill Fear Via Fake Texts, Mugshots

By Tiffany Bernhardt Schultz, Southwest Wisconsin Regional Director
Better Business Bureau

Emergency scams, sometimes called “grandparent scams,” prey on the willingness of an unsuspecting, worried individual to help friends and family in need. Often, they impersonate their targets’ loved ones, make up an urgent situation, and plead for help ... and money.

How the scam works:

You get a call, email or social media message from someone claiming to be a distressed family member. They may say they’ve been arrested or there was an accident, medical emergency, or other calamity. The details are convincing, such as the family names and school details that are shared.

A common version of this scam is the “grandparent scam,” where the con artist contacts a grandparent claiming to be their grandchild. The “grandchild” asks for money to get out of jail, pay medical expenses from an accident incurred while traveling, etc. The plea is so persuasive that the grandparent wires money to the scammer, only to find out later that their family member was safe and sound. The scam can also work in reverse, where the “grandparent” calls their grandchild, pleading for help.

To imitate the voices of loved ones, scammers use voice cloning techniques. The technology enables con artists to copy the voices of people close to you from videos they might find on social media or via other sources. Scammers can then use tools to imitate the voice of your loved one and have it appear to say whatever they wish.

Tips to spot this scam:

Resist the urge to act immediately, no matter how dramatic the story is. Check out the story with other family and friends and/or call your loved one directly before reacting. Don’t call the phone number provided by the caller or caller ID. Ask questions that would be hard for an impostor to answer correctly.

Know what your family members are sharing online. You may not have control over your family’s social media accounts but familiarize yourself with what they share online and what photos they may have posted. Make sure they are aware of this type of scam and advise them to use privacy options to keep other people from seeing and stealing their images.

Don’t send money if you are unsure about the call. If the caller asks you to send money via a payment app or gift card, do your homework to ensure it’s not a scam. If you wire money and later realize it’s fraud, report it to the police.

If you are told someone will come to your home to pick up the money, do not answer your door and call the police immediately. This action could be part of the scam, and the driver may not be aware they are part of the fraud.

Report it. If you’ve experienced a scam, regardless of whether if you lost money, report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker). Your report helps to warn others of the scams taking place in the marketplace.

<https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker>

Falls Prevention Begins with You!

By Ashley Hillman, Falls Prevention Program Manager at Safe Communities'

Prevention is so important in many aspects of our health. In addition to eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise, prevention also includes actions we can take to prevent falls – an injury that impacts at least 1 in 4 older adults each year. As we get older, a fall can be even more impactful whether it results in hip fractures, traumatic brain injury, or even death. We value independence and a fall can take that away. The good news is that proven, effective strategies can prevent a fall from happening in the first place.

Home safety is important in preventing a fall. This includes making sure the home is well lit, nightlights are strategically placed to help us see at night, rugs and other clutter aren't creating trip hazards, and that handrails and grab bars are appropriately installed. Getting our *vision* regularly checked is also important since our eyes are always changing and our sight plays an important role in helping us gauge depth perception and alterations in terrain. *Medications*, including supplements and vitamins, can interact in ways that may lead to dizziness and/or faintness. It's important to talk with a primary care provider or pharmacist about everything we're taking to ensure dosages are appropriate and negative interactions aren't occurring. Continuing to *exercise* and specifically focusing on exercise that will help improve strength and balance is imperative. We use

our muscles all the time, whether we're getting up from a chair, stepping down from a curb, or even crawling into bed. Ensuring we have the strength and stability to continue to do these things safely can help prevent a fall.

It's important to know and understand our risk of falling and to know what might be causing that risk. The **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's STEADI toolkit** has a wealth of resources: <https://bit.ly/40es74u>. The **Falls Free Wisconsin Center** is a great resource for Wisconsinites that includes lots of helpful information and even a home safety challenge where you can identify potential hazards in a real Wisconsin home: <https://fallsfreewi.org/>. Finally, **Safe Communities** is a great resource for educational videos and listings of classes and programs in Dane County to help on your falls prevention journey: <https://bit.ly/48hUK2H>. So as the leaves start to change and there's a slight chill in the air, take a moment to increase your awareness about falls and the impact they can have on individuals, families, and entire communities. Check out the helpful resources available at the national, state, and local levels in your own community! Spread the good news that falls CAN be prevented. Let's all do what we can to stay safe, independent, and upright.

From page 4, Ireland for Seniors

medicine so it won't cost you an arm and a leg to see a doctor.

Don't get me wrong, we're not trying to scare you. International travel can be fun

and exciting. But we're not youngsters anymore and awareness and our physical condition can make a difference between a satisfying trip or a miserable one. Knowing what to expect and understanding your limitations can make all the difference.

New Traffic Lane Markings on Madison's Streets

By Mike Thomsen, Triad Coordinator

If you haven't driven in Madison lately, you may be a bit surprised by the new RED traffic lane markings painted on some of the city's major streets, and it could be a little confusing. There's a new bus route in Madison, Rapid Route A <https://bit.ly/4f2TlyW> that travels these streets. The "A" offers service every 15 minutes using 60-foot long, all-electric, "bendy" buses that bend in the middle when going around corners.

The first thing to remember is that, in general, *if the lane is painted bright red or has a solid red line, it is a BUS ONLY lane*, and regular motorists are not allowed to use the lane. On the right are two examples of these markings you will see on the street along Rapid Route A. Along some parts of the route the BUS ONLY lane is on the right side of the street, as in the top example, and along others it is on the left side, as in the bottom example, so be careful. When the white line is dashed, drivers are permitted to cross over the bus lane to make a left turn. Be careful, though, to stay out of the solid red painted part of the lane as much as possible.

During the *RUSH HOUR* along two short sections of East Washington Ave (between Milwaukee St and Wright St) and West Johnson St (between Bassett St and State St) motorists are permitted to drive in the BUS ONLY lane.

Finally, you will notice some special signal lights, intended ONLY for the buses, that let the buses seemingly "run a red light." Motorists should continue to follow the standard red, yellow, and green traffic signals.

For a more complete explanation of the new lane markings, visit the Bus Only Traffic Lanes webpage <https://bit.ly/4hmMmTJ>.

Editor: This newsletter is written by Triad volunteers and partners who want to help older adults live safer, healthier lives. If you would like to join us, please email mthomsen@rsvpdane.org.

Only buses, bicycles, and emergency vehicles should continuously use bus lanes.

