

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

Pills that Prevent the Common Cold? A Tough Claim to Swallow

Can herbal or natural remedies prevent or cure the common cold? Some tablets, pills, and powders, sold in neighborhood stores and by national retailers, have been touted as products that can prevent or cure colds and fight germs in ads on radio and television, in national publications and in-flight magazines, and by celebrities.

Attorneys for the Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, say that these products simply don't live up to their hype. The marketers of these products lack the reliable scientific evidence required by law to back up the claims they make.

Medical experts agree that there is no cure for the common cold. Indeed, the FTC is investigating – and has already sued – several marketers of products that claimed to prevent colds, fight germs, reduce the severity or duration of a cold, or protect against sickness in crowded places.

The best defense against a cold is prevention through good hygiene like frequent hand washing and healthy habits like eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising. Should you have a cold, relief comes from drinking fluids, resting, and taking over-the-counter cold medicines that treat specific symptoms.

To learn more about preventing and treating colds and flu, visit the Food and Drug Administration at www.fda.gov and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at www.niaid.nih.gov.

For more information about the kinds of advertising claims that can be made for dietary supplements, see the FTC's "Dietary Supplements: An Advertising Guide for Industry" at www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/dietsupp.shtm; for labeling claims, see the FDA's "Claims That Can Be Made for Conventional Foods and Dietary Supplements" at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/hclaims.html.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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