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The Think Muscle Newsletter publishes the latest news and research on exercise physiology, dietary supplements, performance enhancement, lifestyle management, health & nutrition, and bodybuilding & fitness. The newsletter is dedicated to providing accurate and unbiased scientifically based information.

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Message from the Editor in Chief: Things *Can* Be Different

by [Bryan Haycock](#)

In this issue we take a look at the dishonesty in the dietary supplement industry. I wanted to address this issue, not so that we might all sit around and complain and point fingers, but so that we could all wake up to the situation, and perhaps move towards improving things. Improving things is all our responsibility, both those that sell supplements, and those that buy them.

Those that sell supplements can do their part in a number of ways.

- One, they can do their part by first refusing to sell supplements that don't work, even if there is consumer demand. (I think I can hear the entire industry laughing now.)

I'm talking both about selling compounds that don't work no matter what the dose, as well as those that don't work because of the minuscule amounts you put in your products. This will have the effect of improving consumer confidence, and repairing the reputation that exists that all supplements are worthless.

- Two, they can stop using deceptive advertising. Simply put, stop making false claims, and stop making people think your products are going to magically transform their bodies over night.
- Three, they can stop pretending you are physicians and your products drugs. Pretending you are selling drugs is the fastest way to get the supplement industry under the thumb of the federal government.
- Four, they MUST stop ripping people off! Stop diluting your supplements with filler. Make sure that if your label says you've got 100 milligrams in each capsule, you've got 100 milligrams or more. Now I want to add here that sometimes it is not the companies fault at all, it is the bottler that is tampering with the formulas. You must make sure that if you are not doing your own bottling in house, that you are using a manufacturer that doesn't dilute the product to increase their profits. If you've got your name on the label, it is your responsibility to make sure the product meets label claims.

As consumers there are things you can do as well.

- One, always remember that consumer demand controls this industry. Every product you see on the shelf is there for one reason, because people are willing to buy it. Now, supplement companies will try to manipulate demand (and you) by creating deceptive advertisements and flooding the magazines with them. It's your responsibility to take back control. Do your homework before you buy anything so that you don't end up buying worthless products. This will quickly help to get worthless products off the shelf.
- Two, demand that supplement companies demonstrate their expertise in human physiology.
- Three, make them show you the *independent* peer reviewed studies that justifies them selling each particular ingredient. If there is none, make them tell you this up front.
- Four, make them show you that the product will work as formulated (i.e. potency), not just theoretically with 10 times the dose.
- Five, get to know the company. Keep in mind that there are real people behind all the ads. Email them. Visit their website. Email the individuals responsible for the product formulas. Ask them both about their products as well as products they *don't* sell. Try to get a feel for their honesty, or lack thereof.

As you can see, there is a lot that we can do, both as consumers and as supplement companies, to improve the integrity of our industry. Only good can come from a push to improve the level of honesty in advertising, and the level of education of consumers. It is ThinkMuscle's, and my own purpose, to do just that.

-bryan

Scammers, Shysters, and Snake Oil Salesmen

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Anyway you spell it, it still means thief! There is an ongoing and worsening problem in the dietary supplement industry, theft from the consumer by the manufacturer. It happens in all industries, but perhaps never so much as within the dietary supplement industry.

As in most instances of corruption, it isn't everybody who is stealing from the public, just enough bad apples to endanger the whole industry. Although you can't stop people who are determined to steal, there are some things that you can do to protect yourself. But first, let's take a look at some of the methods that are being used in the supplement industry to rip you off.

99.9% Junk is Still Junk

Just because a bottle meets label claims, doesn't mean you're not being scammed. 9 out of 10 supplement companies are happy to sell you high quality supplements that don't work. All you have to do is be willing to pay for it.

Take GH releasers and other OTC GH products for example. As far as I can tell from the junk mail I get, they are quite popular...again. These are some of the most expensive supplements you can buy. You would think with such a high price, you were really getting something of value. But are you?

Companies that sell "GH releasers" use research on GH itself to sell their products. This is deceiving because studies looking at how GH works in the body, does not tell us anything about what a supplement company's *non-GH* concoction of amino acids and whatnot will do. In fact, independent studies to date have failed to show any benefit of amino acid based supplements designed to increase training effectiveness through GH elevation. (1,2,3,4) This should come as no surprise considering the fact that even full-blown high dose (many times more than any supplement can produce) injections of pure hGH have failed to show increases in muscle mass gains with training. (5,6,7) Laying down any amount of money for a supplement claiming to give you the benefits of GH therapy is a total waste, and only perpetuates the problem of fraud in the industry.

So in addition to GH releasers, there are many other compounds that may indeed meet label claims for potency, but still offer nothing to the consumer to increase muscle mass and/or strength, glutamine probably being the next biggest rip off next to GH releasers. (8,9) Here is an abbreviated list in no particular order of supplements that have questionable if not negligible value (keep in mind that I am a supplement *advocate*):

- Glutamine

- Chinese, Korean, and American ginsengs
- Siberian ginseng
- Rhodiola
- Yohimbe
- Cordyceps fungus
- Shilajit or mummio
- Smilax
- Avena Sativa (oats)
- Muira puama
- Ecdysterone (Suma)
- Tribulus terrestris
- Liquid Creatine
- Saw palmetto berries
- β -sitosterol and other related sterols
- Diosgenin (wild yams)

Now a lot of companies aren't going to be too happy with this list because they have built their entire inventory of this kind of stuff. As long as people continue to fork out their hard earned money for this stuff, there will always be somebody willing to sell it to you.

Pharmaceutical Grade Fools Gold.

One of the most insidious trends to flourish in the supplement industry is what can only be called "Medical Imposters". These charlatans disguise their concoctions as drugs. This strategy stemmed from what they perceive as their market's distrust of dietary supplements (gee I wonder why) and a socially ingrained trust in doctors and the drugs they prescribe. So they dress up their pills and creams in prescription looking boxes, they use prescription style bottles (sometimes they will even sell their stuff in syringes), then they make up drug-like names for them.

These companies can often be identified not only by their General Hospital-looking products, but also by the lack of information they give about what is actually in their products. When you go to their site or ask them outright, they simply tell you that the mysterious compound with the made up name is in it.

If the charade fails to convince the skeptical buyer, they will brandish an article made up to look like a bona fide medical study. They'll start with an abstract and then go on to the introduction, methods, results, and discussion just like the format you find in authentic independent research studies. All in all, the prescription packaging, the medical sounding names, and the mock research (A.K.A. ad copy) presents a *very* convincing package to most people. Unfortunately, their game is all filler with no "active ingredient".

It's Like Taking Candy From a Baby

There is another type of company that doesn't go to the trouble of giving you 100% of something that doesn't work, instead, they give you a tiny bit of stuff that does work, and fill the rest of the capsule with filler.

A recent study in the Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine (10) exposes what has been going on in the supplement industry for decades. These researchers randomly selected and purchased 12 different prohormone products from 12 different companies. They then used high-pressure liquid chromatography (HPLC) to determine the chemical makeup of each product. They found that 11 of the 12 products contained significantly less active compound than the label claimed. Some of them even lacked any active ingredient at all! 11 of 12 randomly picked products right off the shelf were ripping people off.

This kind of thing used to happen all the time during the era of prohibition. Alcohol dealers would water down the alcohol in the bottles to increase their profits. Pretty simple really, put only half the product in each bottle and you essentially double your profits. The same kind of "business" people are now selling supplements. Accept when the product comes in a pill, or a capsule, there is no way for the consumer to tell whether it contains as much as the label claims or not. Then when the gains don't come, they can simply blame you for not training or eating right.

Protect yourself

You can avoid spending a lot of money on worthless supplements by doing your homework first. Don't just run out and buy something because the ad was compelling, or because the before and after pictures look too good to believe, or because by the time you got to the 6th page of the ad you found yourself in a strange trance-like state bent on purchasing their supplements, or even because some big guy at the gym said it worked. Do your own research. Become an educated consumer.

The first thing anybody should do is search the medical journals. If a supplement really works, there is bound to be some research demonstrating what the compound actually does. This may sound like a daunting task, but it isn't, not with the internet. Simply go to [MedLine](#) and type in your search word and see what comes up. If absolutely nothing comes up, you can be pretty sure the stuff is not worth the money. I must add that although this method works 99% of the time, there are a few instances where you won't find any research looking specifically at the compound you're interested in. For example, you won't find any research on any of the prohormones that actually work. Everything else should show up on Medline if it is legitimate. There is a bit more to doing your homework with medical journals, but this will get you started.

Then, if you still need convincing, do a search on any of a number of search engines and see what come up for a given compound. Check the online magazines for articles on how various supplements work and their mechanism of action. You should also hang out at message boards and forums to see what people are saying about a given compound or supplement. Ask questions to see what people have to say.

Of course, in all this you still have to use your own judgment. Often times, people will trash a supplement because it didn't turn them into Ronnie Coleman. So you have to read with a discriminating eye.

Finally, lets say you *have* found enough evidence to give a certain supplement a try. You've done a Medline search and found some interesting research indicating that a supplement works in some fashion. You've surfed the net and found some good unbiased articles on the supplement you're interested in. You've even spent some time on message boards to find out what others peoples experience has been.

But still, you can't really tell which companies are scammers, and which are legitimate. Here is what you do, contact the companies personally. Talk to the person who designed the supplement. Ask them questions about it. Ask them how to take it and what they can expect from it. Ask them about supplements that you already know *don't* work and see what they say. While you're talking, ask yourself if you trust this person. Ask yourself if there is any deception in their advertising. All of these simple things will bring you into contact with the company. Only then can you decide if you trust them or not. You have to actually communicate with them.

If they are a good company, they won't try to hide anything. There won't be any deceptive advertising either. They won't be defensive and they won't slam other companies to try to make themselves look good. They will know all about the research and will be able to explain in simple yet accurate terms anything you want to know about their supplements and the science behind them. They will also tell you when they don't know the answer.

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An Interview with Dr. Eric Serrano.

by ThinkMuscle

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Here in the United States most physicians have an antagonistic view towards dietary supplements. It is nice to know there are some physicians out there utilizing all the tools at their disposal, including dietary supplements. It's our pleasure to have spoken briefly with hi for this months issue of ThinkMuscle.

Originally from Puerto Rico, Dr. Eric Serrano is a graduate of Kansas State University and earned his medical degree for Kansas University, currently he is a professor of family practice medicine at the Ohio State University. Dr. Serrano also has his own practice in Pickerington; a suburb of Columbus Ohio. Dr. Serrano has a special interest in sports medicine, nutritional supplements, and works with athletes at all levels.

[ThinkMuscle] Hello Dr. Serrano. Thank you so much for your time in entertaining a few questions from ThinkMuscle.

[Dr. Serrano] No problem

[TM] I know you have written for a large number of magazines and websites, and we are pleased to have you on ThinkMuscle today. Could you list some of the magazines and websites that you have written for?

[Dr. S] I have written for a lot of web sites and magazines, but I haven't really sat down and made a list. The writer is only as good as the people that read the article, so I know clients the clients that come as a result of my articles, but not magazines.

[TM] Fair enough. I know you were one of the presenters at this year's SWIS symposium in Toronto Canada. What subject did you cover?

[Dr. S] I covered nutrition in general and I came up with a new food pyramid. This new food pyramid will be the center focus of my new book.

[TM] We look forward to seeing what you've put together when the book comes out. What are some of the supplements you have found to be most effective with your patients?

[Dr. S] I have two categories of supplements that I use and sometimes they crossover. I use both those for health and those more specifically for performance, depending on the situation and the needs of the client.

The best for health are the fatty acids, glandulars, multivitamins, enzymes and fiber. For performance, I use fatty acids, creatine, various amino acids, protein shakes, fiber and thermogenics. Once again, it all depends on the situation.

[TM] Sure. There is a tendency for a lot of physicians to dismiss dietary supplements all together. They often consider them to be a total waste of time and money, and perhaps even dangerous. Obviously you don't adhere to this point of view. What was it in your career and/or training that contributed to your being an advocate of dietary supplements?

[Dr. S] Well, what got me into supplements is a long story but I will tell you the main thing was simply results. With the proper use of supplements and of course with diet changes my patients get a lot better. I tried the drug, or the dark side, and it just didn't give me the same results. But with dietary changes and various supplements I have seen depression, cancer, fatigue, and hypertension all go away.

I think we have two types of genes, the ones you can't change like your eye color, and the inducible ones that you can change with environment or nutrition. The food quality has gone down and it is not the same as it was so we have to make up for poor quality of our food.

[TM] That's a very interesting approach. In closing, I was hoping you could give your opinions about what supplements should serve as the foundation for somebody who is looking to get the most out of their diet and exercise routine and why?

[Dr. S] My foundation will depend on the person's goals and their current state of health. I am going to make some recommendations based on general goals like weight gain, or weight loss, etc.

For weight gain I would suggest the following:

- 1- Fatty acid combinations like olive oil, CLA, and fish oils.

2-Creatine

3- Branch Chain Amino Acids

4-Protein powders

For weight loss I suggest:

1-Thermogenics

2-Fiber

3-ALPHA OMEGA-3- A propriety combination of fatty acids that I created.

[TM] Thank you so much for your time today Dr. Serrano. It is good to know that not all physicians fail to see the health benefit of proper supplementation. Best of luck in your practice and we look forward to your new book.

[Dr. S] My pleasure.

The views expressed in this article are those of Dr. Serrano, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor.

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Team Think Muscle Be on the Cutting Edge!

Spread the word about the Think Muscle Newsletter and send the latest information on health, fitness, nutrition, training, and supplementation to all your colleagues, friends, and family. Give all these people THE BEST and latest information to allow them to increase their knowledge base and develop their best body ever! By sharing this incredible information, you are giving the gift of health. ACT NOW! Anyone can subscribe to the FREE weekly newsletter online at <http://www.thinkmuscle.com/newsletter.htm>. You can also send us the name and email addresses of five of your friends and we will automatically send them an invitation to join and a copy of our most recent newsletter. Imagine people you refer getting this amazing and detailed information for FREE. They will definitely be indebted to you! If you refer five people to us, we will also enroll you for FREE into Team Think Muscle, which will give you some great benefits in the future -- more details to come!

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Reader Survey
Tell Us What You Think?

1. Message from the Editor in Chief: Things Can Be Different

- It was good.
- It was okay.
- I didn't like it.
- I'm not interested.

2. Scammers, Shysters, and Snake Oil Salesmen

- It was good.
- It was okay.
- I didn't like it.
- I'm not interested.

3. An Interview with Dr. Eric Serrano.

- It was good.
- It was okay.
- I didn't like it.
- I'm not interested.

4. What type of articles would you like to see in the future? (Check all that apply.)

- Anabolic Steroids and Pharmaceuticals
- Anti-aging medicine
- Body Transformation
- Children's Health and Nutrition
- Competitive Bodybuilding
- Diet and Nutrition Reviews
- Dietary Supplements
- Exercise Physiology
- Fitness Competitions
- Fitness Psychology
- General Health Topics
- Lifestyle Management
- Men's Health
- Powerlifting
- Seniors Health Topics
- Sports Specific Training
- Women's Health and Nutrition

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We hope you have enjoyed the latest issue of the Think Muscle Newsletter. Suggestions? Comments? Questions? We'd love to hear them!

Best regards,

The Think Muscle Editorial Staff

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