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Report: Fish Oil Supplement Quality Spotty

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Review

Fish oil supplements can be a bit fishy in terms of quality, according to *Consumer Reports* magazine.

In lab tests of 15 major brands, the magazine said, "six fell a bit short on quality."

"In our recent tests, we found that some (supplements) were not as pure as one might think," the magazine's health editor, Ronni Sandroff, said in a statement.

But a spokesman for the Council for Responsible Nutrition, an industry group, said the magazine was putting a "negative spin" on what was really a positive report.

Fish oil supplements are a booming business, largely because of the health benefits associated with eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), omega-3 fatty acids that can reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Consumer Reports tested three lots each of the 15 brands to see if they contained the amount of EPA and DHA that they claimed and also to check on levels of lead, mercury, dioxins, or polychlorinated biphenyls.

The bottom line, the magazine said, is that "all had their labeled amount of EPA and DHA." As well, none of them had contaminant levels that exceed standards set by the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP), a nongovernmental agency, or by the European Union.

In other words, the products "meet all of their applicable legal and regulatory requirements," said Duffy MacKay, ND, vice-president for scientific and regulatory affairs for the industry group.

The report is actually a positive assessment of the tested products, MacKay told *MedPage Today*.

The shortfalls the magazine noted include:

- Four of the products had at least one sample with PCB levels that could require a warning label under a California consumer law
- One product had "elevated levels of compounds that indicate spoilage"
- Two samples of another supplement failed a test for pills with enteric coatings,

suggesting the coatings might dissolve more quickly than intended, leaving a fishy aftertaste

Consumer Reports quoted the FDA as saying the agency has not taken action against any manufacturer for contaminants because it doesn't see a health risk.

MackKay said the California law cited by the magazine -- Proposition 65 -- is intended to let consumers know what is in products and has "nothing to do with health-related risk."

He noted that the law is "exclusive to California," where he said none of the tested products has been taken off shelves.

MackKay also said the magazine used a test for spoilage that is intended to detect a compound called anisidine, but used it on products that were lemon-flavored.

The addition of the lemon flavoring causes the test to yield a false positive, he said.

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