

American Family Physician Advertising Principles: Nutritional Supplements, Foods, Food Additives, and Other Products that Make Health Claims

American Family Physician content aims to present clinically useful and scientifically supported information to its readers, and there is a similar expectation for products that are advertised in *AFP*. Non-pharmaceutical products, including nutritional supplements and nutraceuticals, foods, food additives, as well as other products, occasionally make claims with regard to health benefits that have not undergone a formal review process, such as U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approval.

For this reason, *AFP* has adopted its own review process to determine a product's safety and efficacy with regard to its indication and use.

For a product that makes health claims, either explicitly or implicitly, one of the two following criteria must be achieved to meet *AFP*'s advertising standards.

The criteria to be met are:

1. The product either has FDA approval for the indication and use that is being advertised,
2. Or the product has adequate support in the medical literature for its safety and efficacy with regard to the advertised indication and use. "Adequate support" will be judged by *AFP* to have been met only if *at least one* of the following applies:
 - The support is contained in one of the sources of evidence-based reviews listed in the "Literature Search and Data Sources" section of *AFP*'s Authors' Guide (www.aafp.org/journals/afp/authors.html),
 - *Or* the support is contained in a clinical guideline by one of the major medical organizations (e.g., American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, etc.),
 - *Or* the support is contained in an endorsement by a major governmental health organization, such as one of the Centers of the National Institutes of Health.

If one of the above sources states that there is inadequate support for a product's safety and efficacy with regard to the advertised indication and use, then the advertisement cannot be approved.

In addition, the advertisement must acknowledge common or important potential adverse effects, as well as relevant limitations, controversies, or conflicting evidence when those factors exist. No marketing message can be so unbalanced as to be judged unacceptably misleading.

When judgment calls must be made regarding the *appearance* of health claims, or regarding the support in the medical literature for a product's safety and efficacy, prevailing decisions will

be based on an *AFP review process* that includes consultation with the *AFP* editor-in-chief per CMSS Code. If there is conflicting evidence, the *AFP* review process will look for the preponderance and strength of the evidence to support the advertised use and an *AFP* decision must prevail.

Note: In instances in which the product *can* be pursued for *AFP* advertising but the advertising creative asset does not appropriately support the product's safe and appropriate use, *AFP* advertising staff can identify problems with advertising copy but cannot cross lines of conflict of interest by writing or recommending specific new advertising copy.

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