

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

American Family Physician aims to present clinically useful and scientifically supported information to its readers. Non-pharmaceutical products, including foods, food additives, nutritional substances, and nutraceuticals, as well as health devices, 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) approval.

For this reason, *AFP* has adopted a surrogate 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, such as the American Heart Association, the American Diabetes Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists,
 - *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 will not 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. The presentation must not 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 *AFP*'s review process. If there is conflicting evidence, the *AFP* review process will look for the preponderance and strength of the evidence to support the advertised use. In such cases, *AFP*'s decision will prevail.