

Letters to the Editor

Multivitamin products may contain more than vitamins

Aust Prescr 2021;44:185

<https://doi.org/10.18773/austprescr.2021.054>

There are additional considerations regarding the safety of commonly used vitamins and minerals.¹ These include the addition of listed medicines to the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods that style themselves as a multivitamin product but contain other ingredients. These may include chemicals (e.g. chromium picolinate, selenomethionine), other substances (e.g. concentrated fish omega-3 triglycerides) or various herbal substances (e.g. *Panax ginseng*, *Ginkgo biloba*). The consumer may not be alerted to the presence of these ingredients by the product name.

Changes to the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989* following the recommendations of a review² have resulted in a cookbook list of 'permissible ingredients' in listed medicines. The Act requires that if the sponsor submits certain designated certifications, including that the product is safe for the purposes for which it is to be used, the relevant official in the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) must list the medicine. The product may then be marketed in Australia.

It is only sometimes later, if at all, that the TGA will review those certifications, the product's presentation (including name) and evidence supporting the inclusion of other substances in a multivitamin product. There is no requirement that the evidence includes an adequate study of clinical efficacy and safety of the exact formulation used in the product.

Australian consumers are being exposed to 'multivitamin' products with curious formulations and inadequate product names.

John McEwen PSM

Retired medical adviser, Therapeutic Goods Administration, Canberra

REFERENCES

1. Moses G, AM. The safety of commonly used vitamins and minerals. *Aust Prescr* 2021;44:119-23. <https://doi.org/10.18773/austprescr.2021.029>
2. Sansom L, AO, Delaat W, AM, Horvath J, AO. Review of Medicines and Medical Devices Regulation: recommendations. July 2015. <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Expert-Review-of-Medicines-and-Medical-Devices-Regulation#recommendations> [cited 2021 Oct 10]

Geraldine Moses AM, author of the article, comments:



It is a very valid point that many 'vitamin and mineral' products sold in Australia contain ingredients that are neither vitamins nor minerals. Given that the product names invariably give no hint that substances such as fish oil and *Ginkgo biloba* are co-formulated, it is possible that consumers are taking them unknowingly. The potential for adverse effects and drug interactions from these additional substances is likely be underestimated.

Although a comprehensive list of all ingredients is usually included on the labelling of medicines listed by the TGA, consumers may still be unaware that these substances are not vitamins or minerals. It would be preferable if the TGA required that multivitamin and mineral products stated clearly, in the brand name area of the labelling, that the product contains such substances in addition to the vitamins and minerals.



The Editorial Executive Committee welcomes letters, which should be less than 250 words. Before a decision to publish is made, letters which refer to a published article may be sent to the author for a response. Any letter may be sent to an expert for comment. When letters are published, they are usually accompanied in the same issue by any responses or comments. The Committee screens out discourteous, inaccurate or libellous statements. The letters are sub-edited before publication. Authors are required to declare any conflicts of interest. The Committee's decision on publication is final.