

# CONSUMER ADVISORY

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By Attorney General Tom Miller

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## Health Fraud: Protecting Your Wellness and Your Wallet

We all want to stay healthy. And some want nothing more than to trade your money for your hope that their product will prevent, treat or cure diseases or conditions. But, unlike most other types of scams that cost you money, health fraud scams can cost you much more: your wellness and perhaps even your life.

### What is Health Fraud?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), defines health fraud as deceptively promoting a health product as being effective against a disease or health condition when the product has not been scientifically proven safe and effective for that purpose.

### Forms of Health Fraud

The claims and supposed quick fixes are endless, but they often refer to a “scientific breakthrough,” “miracle cure,” “secret ingredient,” “all natural,” or a “new discovery.” Sellers often promote their products to treat weight loss without diet or exercise; slow, stop or reverse the effects of aging; enhance sexual performance; slow, prevent or reverse memory loss; treat arthritis; and prevent, treat or cure serious diseases such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, or cancer. In some cases, scammers will even claim that their product will treat literally hundreds of conditions.

### A Testimonial is not Scientific Evidence

Some sellers will use testimonials to help market their products. They may be actors who appear to be doctors or actors appearing as “actual consumers” who make claims about the product in advertisements. These are often scripted claims and are not scientific evidence.

### Risks of Health Fraud

Selling consumers products that don’t work as promised do more than financial damage. Unproven and non-FDA-approved products can expose consumers to health risks. They may delay or prevent consumers from getting the proper diagnosis and treatment. While, in some cases, fraudulent or non-approved products may have no impact on the body, there are other cases where the products could be harmful or even fatal. And some vitamins and minerals, which may be beneficial in certain quantities, could cause health problems if consumed in excessive quantities.

### Questions about a Miracle Cure? Ask a Health Professional

Serious conditions like cancer, diabetes & HIV require individualized treatments by a physician. Before you buy or use an unproven product or one with questionable claims, seek advice from trusted health professionals who know you. They are best situated to evaluate the best treatments for you—particularly if you are currently taking prescription medication.

### Report Health Fraud

If you believe someone is making fraudulent claims about a health product, report it to the Federal Trade Commission:

Toll-free: 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)

Website: [www.ftc.gov/complaint](http://www.ftc.gov/complaint)

Or contact the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division:

Toll-free outside of the Des Moines area: 1-888-777-4590

Des Moines metro area: 515-281-5926

Email: [consumer@iowa.gov](mailto:consumer@iowa.gov)

Website: [www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.gov)