

Tip-offs to rip-offs: Don't fall for health fraud scams

The FDA offers some tip-offs to help you identify health fraud rip-offs.

One product does it all. Be suspicious of products that claim to cure a wide range of diseases.

Personal testimonials. Success stories, such as “It cured my diabetes” or “My tumors are gone,” are easy to make up and are not a substitute for scientific evidence.

Quick fixes. Few diseases or conditions can be treated quickly, even with legitimate products. Beware of language such as “Lose 30 pounds in 30 days” or “Eliminates skin cancer in days.”

“All natural.” Some plants found in nature (such as poisonous mushrooms) can kill when consumed even though they are perfectly “natural.” Also, FDA has found numerous products promoted as “all natural” but that contain hidden and dangerously high doses of prescription drug ingredients or even untested active ingredients.

“Miracle cure.” Alarms should go off when you see this claim or others like it such as “new discovery,” “scientific breakthrough,” or “secret ingredient.” If a real cure for a serious disease were discovered, it would be widely reported through the media and prescribed by health professionals—not buried in print ads, TV infomercials, or on Internet sites.

Conspiracy theories. Claims like “The pharmaceutical industry and the government are working together to hide information about a miracle cure” are always untrue and unfounded. These statements are used to distract you from the obvious, common-sense questions about the so-called miracle cure.

Even with these tips, fraudulent health products are not always easy to spot. If you're tempted to buy an unproven product or one with questionable claims, check with your doctor or other health care professional first. You can file a complaint with the FDA at its website: www.fda.gov.

