

## Protecting & Promoting Human Health

If you have concerns about fraudulent activity on the Internet and elsewhere – you're not alone. We've all read reports about fraudulent actions that ended with harmful or dire results. See the information below to learn how government agencies are working to protect and promote human health.

### The Internet & Health Fraud Is there protection against it?

Here's how the federal government protects consumers from false or misleading



claims posted on the Internet:

The **Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) regulates drugs and medical devices to ensure that they are safe and effective. The FDA's "Buying Medicines and Medical Products Online" (<http://www.fda.gov/oc/buyonline/default.htm>) web page and "Buying Prescription Medicine Online: A Consumer Safety Guide" (<http://www.fda.gov/buyonlineguide>) give guidance to consumers shopping for health care products online. "Tips for the Savvy Supplement User" (<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/%20~dms/ds-savvy.html#resources>) gives advice about how to evaluate claims about dietary supplements and what to look for in websites selling them.

Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857  
1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332) (toll-free)  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

The **Federal Trade Commission** (FTC) enforces consumer protection laws. As part of its mission, the FTC investigates complaints about false or misleading health claims posted on the Internet. The FTC's Operation Cure-All page (<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/cureall/index.html>) has information to help evaluate health product claims.

Federal Trade Commission  
Consumer Response Center  
CRC-240 Washington, DC 20580  
1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) (toll-free)  
TTY: 1-866-653-4261 (toll-free)  
[www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)<sup>5</sup>

For more information on consumer agencies that can help you with Internet fraud and other scams, see "Specific E-Commerce Topics" at [http://www.consumer.gov/econsumer/english/contentfiles/shoptips\\_2.html](http://www.consumer.gov/econsumer/english/contentfiles/shoptips_2.html).

### The Mail & Health Fraud When the U.S. Mail System is Misused

U.S. Postal Inspectors investigate any crime in which the U.S. Mail is used to further a scheme – whether it originated in the mail, by

telephone, or on the Internet. The use of the U.S. Mail is what makes it mail fraud.

If evidence of a postal violation exists, Postal Inspectors may seek prosecutive or administrative action against the violator. However, if money is lost through a fraudulent scheme conducted via the mail, Inspectors lack the authority to ensure you receive a refund and can't require that products, services, or advertisements – on the Internet or elsewhere – be altered.

Postal Inspectors base investigations of mail fraud on the number, pattern, and substance of complaints received from the public. The Postal Inspection Service will carefully review the information you provide. They may share the information with other agencies when there is a possible violation within their jurisdiction.



If you feel you've been victimized in a fraud scheme that involves the U.S. Mail, submit a Mail Fraud

Complaint Form (<http://www.usps.com/postalinspectors/fraud/MailFraudComplaint.htm>) to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.<sup>7</sup>

## Teaming Up to Keep You Safe & Healthy International Efforts Make Strides

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have teamed up with Canada's Health Products and Food Branch (HPFB), Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Competition Bureau; and Mexico's Federal Commission for the Protection of Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS) and Federal Office of the Judge Advocate General of Consumers

(PROFECO) to protect and promote human health through sharing information in the areas of drugs, biologics, medical devices,



food safety, and nutrition. These agencies then work together in areas of mutual interest.<sup>8</sup> Take a look at the web “teasers”<sup>9</sup> they’ve developed to help consumers make wise, informed choices about diet and health:

- FatFoe Eggplant Extract at <http://wemarket4u.net/fatfoe/>
- Glucobate at <http://wemarket4u.net/glucobate/index.html>.

For more information on finding credible and accurate information and avoiding harmful products and programs, see the previous issue of *HealthHints* entitled “Health Claims & Realities” at <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2007mar/healthclaims.pdf> and the accompanying fact sheet “Healthy Resources” at <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2007mar/resources.pdf>.