In last week's episode of Shark Tank, the five "sharks" elevated themselves from wealthy, successful business people to champions of science.

I caught the episode that had originally aired in November, where Catharine Arnston, the Founder/CEO of the Boston based company ENERGYbits made her pitch for their support of her algae supplement company.

The sharks listened to her attentively but, it became quickly apparent when they started asking her questions, that they were not satisfied with her answers regarding both the finances and the science behind her product. But, I am not here to question the sharks decisions about their money. I am here to praise each of them on their decision not to invest in this snake oil company and, in doing so, highlight different reasons why Energybits - and every other company out there like it - is producing and selling a terrible product.

ENERGYbits sells four different types of 'bits' - made from spirulina and chlorella algae. The four different types are, EnergyBITS, SkinnyBITS, RecoveryBITS and VitalityBITS (although it is revealed on the show that SkinnyBITS and EnergyBITS are the same thing in different packaging.) They are sold in bags of 1,000 - a month supply - for $120.00. In case you are wondering about the math, one serving is 30 bits making each serving cost just under $4.00 (although on the website, it incorrectly states that each serving costs $2.80)
Mark Cuban was the first shark to really dig into Catherine and uncover the lack of science behind the product. His face when she listed the benefits of energybits - "they give you energy, increase your focus, satisfy your hunger, increase athletic performance and speed recovery" - is a masterful face of a true skeptic.

When she forgets to mention the amount of money that she is asking for (which is how each pitch typically ends), Cuban says, "I guess it didn't help as much with your memory as you thought, huh?"

He takes no time getting to the most important point, "So, how do you know it works, Catherine?" She looks caught off guard and her first answer is "it's been used for 50 years."

His response of "that doesn't tell us anything" made me swoon a bit, when I realized that Cuban's skeptical face is backed by smart critical thinking.

His snake oil detector remained well calibrated after Catherine continued to flounder, doubling down with the claim that there are 100,000 studies that have documented the efficacy (which she, ironically, could not say properly.) He repeats, in disbelief, "one hundred thousand studies...?" (1)
He then asked her to "give us one" which made me feel almost giddy. When Catherine begins to attempt to try to explain, and spews some sciency-sounding words, Robert Herjavec leans over to Lori Greiner and says, "Oh - this isn't going to go well."

To her claims that algae treats cancer, Cuban asks her why oncologists don't use it? She answers that they don't know about it to which he responds, "They don't know how to read studies, is what you're saying?" Oh boy...

After a few minutes of Catherine talking about why America needs algae, Mark Cuban ends with a gem: "I'm out ... [there is] more than a minimal disconnect from reality."

Lori Greiner became my personal hero when she brought up the fact that Catherine was making irresponsible claims on her unregulated supplements. When Catherine states that she is planning to go to retail, Lori accurately judges that move as "scary" - based on the fraudulent claim that eating Skinnybits will cause weight loss.

Catherine responds with "that's just the name - we don't claim about weight loss at all." Oh boy #2...

Lori says, "it's implied in the name - Skinny. Bits." and that "You need to be responsible that you are not deceiving the public and that you have the claims to back that up." She ends with "I'm out and I think you should be careful."

Daymond John raises a safety issue that could someone be allergic or could get sick. When Catherine says that she doesn't have product liability insurance, his face is full of disgust and he very quickly says, I'm out.

Robert Herjavec ends the nine wonderfully painful minutes with a line that is nothing short of pure genius

I'm not sure you're a business person, I think you're a preacher in the land of algae and I'm not sure I want to pray there. I'm out.

At the end of the uncomfortable-to-watch grilling of Catherine and her junk supplement, the sharks had not only refused to invest their money, they had ripped her to shreds, as good sharks do.

If the sharks can see that Energybits are crap, why can't everyone else?

If you enjoyed this article, you will LOVE watching the episode. Go to Shark Tank Season 8 Episode 9 [2]Minute 21:10 - 30:10. Enjoy!
FOOTNOTE: (1) On NCBI Entrez-pubmed, [3] the resource for all peer-reviewed studies, there are 20806 results for a search for the word “algae” - which would pull up any study at all that had algae in it.

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