

# The problems with the unregulated dietary supplements industry

By ACSH Staff — June 26, 2014



The supplement industry, an industry which we have [written](#)

[about](#) <sup>[1]</sup> numerous times, is a \$30 billion industry, with more than half of Americans taking some form of supplement. However, as David Seres, ACSH friend and Director of Medical Nutrition at Columbia University Medical Center [points out](#) <sup>[2]</sup> in his piece featured in *CNN opinion*, on the 20th anniversary of the Dietary Supplement Health and Educational Act of 1994, an act which allows dietary supplements to go unregulated by the FDA, dietary supplements are not quite the amazing panacea that we have been led to believe.

In fact, they can actually be harmful. As Dr. Seres points out, some nutrients are known to have toxicity if taken in high doses. He gives examples such as vitamin A causing brain swelling and liver failure in high doses, zinc decreasing the levels of copper in the body and vitamin E and selenium supplements may increase risk of prostate cancer. Furthermore, because these supplements are not regulated, industry is not motivated to conduct proper studies to determine their safety and efficacy, as is required for prescription drugs. Yet even physicians are not aware of the lack of information on the safety of dietary supplements.

The bottom line? On this anniversary of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, with lawmakers now willing to challenge this powerful industry, it is time to reassess the regulation of dietary supplements, consider our priorities in how funding is granted for nutrition research, reeducate the community of nutrition experts as well as the public, and be honest about our inability to offer definitive, safe and effective nutritional recommendations.

Read the full piece [here](#) <sup>[2]</sup>!

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[1] <http://acsh.org/2013/04/dietary-supplements-neither-natural-nor-proven-safe/>

[2] [http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/25/opinion/seres-dietary-supplements/index.html?sr=sharebar\\_facebook](http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/25/opinion/seres-dietary-supplements/index.html?sr=sharebar_facebook)