



Lawsuit Raises Fish Oil Supplement Concerns

Posted by [Dr. Mercola](#) | March 23 2010 | 17,050 views

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A lawsuit brought by environmentalists in California claims popular brands of fish oil dietary supplements contain unsafe and illegal levels of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, which are carcinogenic chemicals.



The lawsuit targets eight supplement manufacturers or distributors: CVS Pharmacy, Rite Aid, General Nutrition Corp., Solgar, Twinlab, Now Health, Omega Protein and Pharmavite.

Testing found that levels of PCBs in supplements in popular fish oil products varied wildly, from about 12 nanograms per recommended dose to more than 850 nanograms in the most contaminated product. But the suit claims that *all* of the manufacturers are in violation of California law for not disclosing any non-zero PCB levels in their products.

Sources:



[CBS News March 2, 2010](#)



[ABC News March 3, 2010](#)

Dr. Mercola's
Comments:



As I've been warning for the last decade or so, fish stocks around the world are so widely and thoroughly polluted it's simply not safe to consume nearly any fish product, perhaps not even fish oil. The pollutants in the world's oceans accumulate throughout the fat and tissues of the fish, turning them into little more than carriers of toxins. This isn't all that surprising considering the fact that about **40 tons of mercury is released in the United States** alone, **every year**, due to burning coal to generate electricity. And that's just one type of toxin!

Other common contaminants found in fish include:

- [Polychlorinated biphenyls \(PCBs\)](#)
- Radioactive substances like strontium
- Toxic metals such as cadmium, [lead](#), chromium and [arsenic](#)

As reported by CBS and ABC News above, the lawsuit brought on by two citizen environmentalists and the Mateel Environmental Justice Foundation against several fish oil manufacturers focuses on the first toxin on that list: PCBs.

They claim the fish oil manufacturers and/or distributors of the supplements are in violation of California law, which specifies that the public should not be exposed to more than 90 nanograms of PCBs per day, and requires that consumers be warned about exposure to toxins.

When the plaintiffs had a range of fish oil products tested, they discovered that *every single one of them contained PCB* – even the ones carrying labels claiming the product had been "Screened for PCBs" or "Treated to Remove PCBs."

If correct, this would be an example of misleading labeling at its finest.

The worst offender contained more than 850 nanograms of PCBs, far exceeding California state law.

PCBs have been banned in the United States for decades, yet is a persistent organic pollutant that's still present in our environment. Major health risks include cancer, reproductive problems and impaired fetal brain development.

However, further testing will probably take place before this case is settled. As mentioned by [ABC News above](#), [ConsumerLab.com tested 52 fish oil products](#) in 2008 and found no evidence of mercury, PCBs or other contaminants typically found in fish.

A study published in [Archives of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine](#) in 2003, however, did find mercury in two of five fish oil brands tested.

But even if toxic contamination turns out to be an insignificant concern when it comes to fish oil, I still believe there's [a far superior source of healthy omega-3 fats](#), for a number of reasons.

Other Problems with Fish Oil

I began [warning about farm-raised salmon](#) nearly a decade ago, as it was a major source of PCBs in people's diet. Now, however, it appears nearly all fish are similarly contaminated to some degree.

Clearly, if the source is contaminated, you'll end up with a contaminated product unless stringent measures are in place to remove them, so it's not surprising fish oil is now facing increasing problems with purity. This is just one reason why I strongly recommend getting your omega-3s from a cleaner and more sustainable source, like [krill oil](#).

In addition to that, [over-fishing is yet another growing problem that makes fish oil a less attractive option](#). Krill, on the other hand, is [one of the most sustainable bio masses on the planet](#), and krill, due to its tiny size, do not accumulate toxins the way fish do.

It is also superior to fish oil because it contains phospholipids, antioxidants (more than 47 times the levels found in fish oil!), and omega-3's bonded together in a way that keeps them safe from oxidation, and makes them easily absorbed in your body. So with krill oil, you can ensure that you're getting incredibly healthy fats (EPA and DHA) without having to worry about oxidation issues.

I personally take krill oil every day. I particularly appreciate the fact that the omega-3 is attached to phospholipids that dramatically increase its absorption, especially into brain tissue.

Additional Problems Related to Cod Liver Oil

Certain cod liver oil products were also listed as severely contaminated. But as I've discussed on a couple of occasions recently, cod liver oil may not be a wise choice for other reasons as well.

Retinoic acid, a form of [vitamin A found in cod liver oil, can block the activity of vitamin D](#) by weakly activating the vitamin D response element on genes. Since vitamin D levels are crucial for human health, it is essential to have the proper ratio of vitamin D to vitamin A in your body.

I used to regularly recommend cod liver oil during colder months as it contains both vitamin A and vitamin D in addition to healthy omega-3 fats. These vitamins are essential for most everyone who cannot get regular sun exposure year-round.

But based on the more recent research into the interaction between these two vitamins I've changed my stance. I issued a [revision of my long held recommendation for cod liver oil](#) at the end of 2008. If you missed that important update, please take the time to review it now.

Since then, [additional evidence points to the fact that the ratios of vitamin A and D may be of paramount importance](#) in order to extract optimal health benefits, and most modern cod liver oil simply does not supply it in ideal amounts.

With both fish oil and cod liver oil facing a growing laundry list of problems, I believe there's no better source of omega-3s than krill oil.

If you've been a longtime user of either fish oil or cod liver oil, I urge you to do your homework on this alternative. To get you started, simply enter "krill oil" into the search engine on my site for a number of articles on this topic.