

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer & Business Education

“HGH” Pills and Sprays: Human Growth Hype?

History has it that centuries ago, explorer Ponce DeLeon searched in vain for a Fountain of Youth. Even today, consumers explore store shelves, sail through a tide of TV and radio ads, and navigate the Internet for an elixir to help them maintain a lean, strong body and wrinkle-free skin. Some modern marketers of pills and sprays claim to have found a Fountain of Youth in a substance called HGH – Human Growth Hormone. But the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation’s consumer protection agency, says a closer look at these non-prescription products suggests that they may be nothing more than hype.

Human Growth Hormone is a substance released by the pituitary gland that spurs growth in children and adolescents. Studies published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggested that when injected, HGH may provide some benefits. But these studies dealt with HGH that is available only with a doctor’s prescription. And even the prescription form of HGH has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for anti-aging uses.

Nevertheless, some marketers are trying to capitalize on the studies by selling “imposter” pills and sprays, claiming that they provide the same benefits as prescription HGH. Some products claim to contain actual HGH; others are advertised as HGH “boosters” or “releasers” that promise to increase the body’s ability to make its own HGH. Either way, FTC staff has seen no reliable evidence to support the claim that these “wannabe” products have the same effect as prescription HGH.

In fact, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a follow-up editorial about “imposter” HGH products in 2003, warning, “If people are induced to buy a ‘human growth hormone releaser’ on the basis of research published in the *Journal*, they are being misled.” And for its part, the FDA says it is unaware of any reliable evidence to support anti-aging claims for over-the-counter pills and sprays that supposedly contain HGH. The agency has not approved any such products for anti-aging or any other purpose.

In short, products that claim some connection to HGH that are available without a prescription at the corner drug store, online, or through a telemarketer are long on promises and short on proof when it comes to turning back the hands of time.

The FTC says if you are tempted to buy any over-the-counter product that:

- claims to contain HGH or to boost the body's production of it;
- promises easy weight loss, an effortless increase in muscle mass, or other "too-good-to-be-true" benefits; or
- touts itself as an "anti-aging" shortcut to health and vitality

exercise doubt, and check it out with your health care provider.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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June 2005