

# No Miracle Drugs

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July 19, 2008

When I was a kid, everyone once and a while my folks would leave a comic book out on the breakfast table on Saturday mornings for my sister and I if we had a good week. I loved Underdog, Spiderman and, of course, Star Wars.

In the back of those comics, there would be ads for itching powder, vitamins, sea monkeys and my favorite, x-ray glasses. I remember saving up my \$1.50 and sending it in for my glasses. I was so disappointed when I got them in the mail and I couldn't see through a Kleenex with them.

That disappointment was nothing compared to the disheartening feeling some cancer patients felt after buying "miracle cures" over the Internet that were unproven. The problem is becoming so widespread, the Food and Drug Administration is tightening the screws on these cures, which include teas, supplements, creams and other products. The ingredients of these unproven treatments include bloodroot, shark cartilage, coral calcium, cesium, ellagic acid, and a variety of mushrooms among other products.

These products drew the FDA's ire for falsely claiming to cure, treat or prevent cancer even though they are not agency-approved drugs. The agency issued 25 warning letters to companies and individuals marketing these products, twenty-three of which were American companies.

Some of the unproven claims made by these companies include assertions that their products have the ability to "destroy the enzyme on DNA responsible for cancer cells," and the power to "neutralize" carcinogens. According to the FDA, one company's website touted its product cured a patient's skin cancer in three days.

The FDA is focusing on these products out of fear that they could prevent cancer patients from seeking proper treatment. In addition, the products could be harmful to cancer patients by interacting with other drugs they are taking.

The FDA has cautioned that if its warnings are not heeded, it may seek to seize the products in question and criminally prosecute the offenders.

The FDA did state, however, that comic book itching powder works just fine.