



Department of Health and Human Services  
Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane, (HFI-40)  
Rockville, MD 20857

May 2000  
(FDA) 00-1248

**FDA** U.S. Food and Drug Administration

## Watch Out for Phony Treatments

How can you tell if a medicine or other treatment is phony? One way to tell is to look for certain tricks. People who sell phony health products often use tricks to gain your trust and get your money.

Watch out for ads that talk about:

- secret formulas (Real scientists share what they know.)
- amazing breakthroughs or miracle cures (Real breakthroughs don't happen very often. When they do, real scientists don't call them amazing or miracles.)
- easy weight loss (For most people, the only way to lose weight is to eat less and exercise more.)
- quick, painless, or guaranteed cures.



**Watch out for tricks.**

### Remember:

- ☞ Phony medicines or other treatments cheat you out of your money. Some phony treatments might not hurt you but they won't make you any better either.
- ☞ Some phony treatments might make you even sicker. The best advice: **If it sounds too good to be true, it probably isn't true.**
- ☞ Ask your doctor or the pharmacist at the drug store about treatments that may help you.

## Choosing Treatments to Get Better

When you're sick it isn't always easy to get well again. There are lots of medicines and other ways to treat health problems.

You may hear about some from a friend. Or you may see an ad on TV or in the paper. Or your doctor may recommend a treatment.

It's FDA's job to make sure the medicines and other treatments people buy are safe and really work. Most treatments you can buy have FDA's OK. But some don't.



**An FDA-approved medicine may help you get better.**

Some are phony and are a waste of your money. Some can even make you sicker. Just because a product is advertised doesn't mean it can really do what the ad says it can.

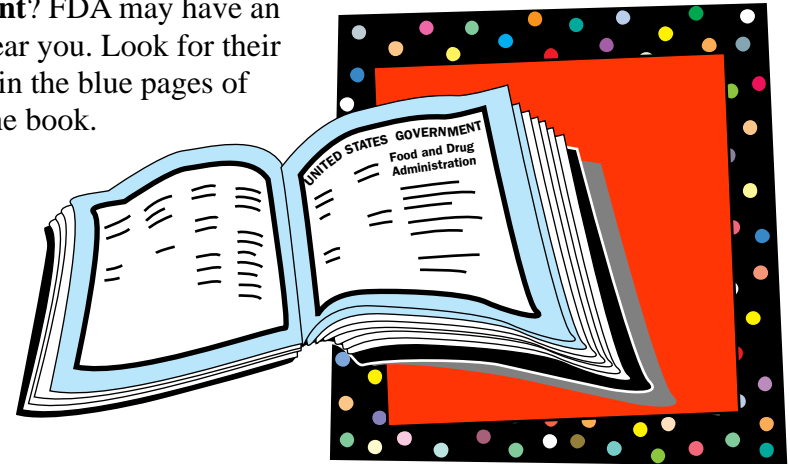


**A phony medicine may make you sicker.**

## Questions?

Do you have questions about any kind of **medical treatment**? FDA may have an office near you. Look for their number in the blue pages of the phone book.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is part of the United States Government. It is FDA's job to make sure drugs and other medical treatments work and are safe.



You can also contact FDA through its toll-free number, 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332). Or, on the World Wide Web at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

Do you have questions about **experimental medicine or clinical trials**? Ask your doctor or write a letter to:

National Institutes of Health  
National Center for Complementary  
and Alternative Medicine  
Clearinghouse  
P.O. Box 8218  
Silver Spring, MD 20907-8218  
Or call toll-free 1-888-644-6226  
Or on the World Wide Web at  
<http://nccam.nih.gov>

## Unproven Treatments

Sometimes there are no treatments with FDA's OK that will help you. This is mainly true for very bad sicknesses like some cancers and AIDS, or with sicknesses that last a long time like arthritis. Then you might hear about a treatment that's still being tested.

There are many unproven treatments. Some you may have heard of are:

- imagery (With imagery, you learn to imagine yourself in a certain way. For example, you might be guided to think of yourself as very strong and healthy and think of your sickness as weak and easy to destroy.)
- hypnosis
- biofeedback (You try to make yourself better by learning to control body functions like your heart rate, temperature, and muscles.)



**There are many unproven treatments. They may work or they may not work.**

If you want to try an unproven treatment, do these things first:

- Talk to people who have tried the treatment. Ask them about everything that happened during and after the treatment—both good and bad.
- Ask the person who is giving the treatment what kind of training they've had and how long they have been doing the treatment.
- Ask how much it will cost. Health insurance may not pay for unproven treatments.
- Tell your doctor you're thinking about trying a new treatment.



**Before you try an unproven treatment talk to someone who knows about it.**

- 👉 The best way to try an unproven treatment is to get into a clinical trial. A clinical trial is an experiment to see if the treatment is safe and really works. Clinical trials must follow exact steps to protect patients. Your doctor may be able to help you find a clinical trial.