



Are Balance of Nature fruit and veggie pills as effective as they claim?



Q: I'm hearing all these radio testimonials for "Balance of Nature Fruits and Veggies." Are their products for real?

A: I previously weighed in on this subject in a newsletter article entitled "Are Fruit and Veggie Pills Really as Effective as They Claim?" There, I wrote:

"Research indicates that the benefits of whole fruits and vegetables cannot be distilled down into a pill. Many of the health effects may be mediated by the impact of substantial portions of healthy fibers and associated phytochemicals on fostering a favorable intestinal microbiome, thus affecting metabolism, immunity, and even mood."

Underscoring this message, a recent review in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* states:

*"The key question is whether a purified phytochemical has the same health benefit as does the whole food or mixture of foods in which the phytochemical is present . . . We propose that the additive and synergistic effects of phytochemicals in fruit and vegetables are responsible for their potent antioxidant and anticancer activities, and that the benefit of a diet rich in fruit and vegetables is attributed to the complex mixture of phytochemicals present in **whole foods** [emphasis added]."*

In other words, pills are not the equivalent of real produce.

Balance of Nature has undertaken a persuasive radio campaign featuring "folksy" testimonials by people with apparently serious medical conditions claiming relief by taking their products.

Speaking as a medical nutritionist with over 35 years of experience in the field, I find these claims highly implausible.

With a little digging, you can discover some disconcerting facts about Balance of Nature.

"Truth in Advertising" bills itself as a consumer advocacy organization:

"Truth in Advertising, Inc. (TINA.org) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Madison, CT, whose mission is to be the go-to online resource dedicated to empowering consumers to protect themselves and one another against false advertising and deceptive marketing. We aim to achieve our mission through investigative journalism, education, advocacy, and the promotion of truth in advertising. We are independently funded and do not accept any advertising dollars to support our

work.” (Source)

In 2016, TINA reported: *“After two readers alerted us to Balance of Nature’s health claims, we visited the company’s website and found a stream of testimonials touting the supplements as a treatment for everything from balding to diabetes to advanced stage cancer.”*

As a result, TINA asked for a response from Balance of Nature. Receiving none, they escalated their complaint to the National Advertising Division (NAD), a council of the Better Business Bureau (BBB), which in turn referred the matter to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the government watchdog agency that oversees the veracity of advertising claims.

After several months delay, the FTC politely informed the NAD that they decided “not to recommend action at this time,” citing, among other things, “resource allocation and enforcement priorities.” In other words, the FTC is so hampered by funding and manpower shortages that Balance of Nature is too small a fish to fry.

But an examination of the BBB website reveals that Balance of Nature has earned a “D-minus” rating. Most of the 15 complaints listed there had to do with automatic re-orders that were impossible to cancel. One typical complainant wrote:

“Three months ago I also called and told you not to send any more vitamins. I DIDN’T AND DON’T WANT ANY MORE PRODUCTS OF ANY KIND FROM YOU!! ZERO NADA NOTHING!!”

The website of a radio station that broadcasts Balance of Nature’s ads describes founder Dr. Douglas Howard (who “studied Homeopathy in Germany, Chiropractic in the United States, and Medicine in Russia”); it reveals that he decries the use of individual vitamins and supplements as “unnatural”—a position that I find wholly unscientific. He encourages people to “Get Real, with Real Food, Real Science, and Real Nutrition.”

Really?