

# Media's Bark Worse Than Its Bite

*A new anti-supplement smear campaign is discredited by bad testing.*

Last month, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman ordered three “big box” retailers to cease selling their store-brand herbal supplements after an investigation revealed that many of these products did not supply the herbs advertised on the label. In some cases, the supplements tested also appeared to include active ingredients from botanicals that were not listed.

Reporters leveraged Schneiderman's order into negative headlines condemning the entire supplement industry, along with sensationalist stories on the alleged “hazards” of supplementation. As we've seen before, the dramatic media storm was followed by urgent calls for widespread reform of the way nutritional supplements are regulated.

But like many of the media's other anti-supplement smear campaigns, reading between the headlines reveals that this investigation may become an embarrassing blunder: Leading scientists now suggest Schneiderman and his team used the wrong tests, and therefore their findings may be meaningless.

### Flawed Methodology

According to Schneiderman, only 21% of products tested were confirmed to supply the botanical ingredients listed on the label. The remaining 79% were found to either be devoid of the correct herbal ingredient, or found to be contaminated with compounds from other plant species.

Here's the problem: Schneiderman's investigation used DNA testing. This

method may be inaccurate when it comes to evaluating herbal extracts, because the extraction process removes DNA as it isolates the plant's most active, beneficial constituents.

“The use of DNA barcoding technology for testing of the identity of botanical dietary supplements is a useful



but limited technology,” explained Mark Blumenthal of the American Botanical Council on his website, [herbalgram.org](http://herbalgram.org). “DNA testing seldom is able to properly identify chemically complex herbal extracts as little or no DNA is extracted in many commercial extraction processes.”

ConsumerLab, a consumer-funded provider of independent test results on nutritional supplements, appears to agree with Blumenthal's assessment. “[Herbal] extracts are not necessarily expected to contain DNA,” reads a statement on [consumerlab.com](http://consumerlab.com), which goes on to point out additional shortcomings: “DNA testing does not evaluate heavy metal contamination nor quantify the amount of an ingre-

dient, i.e., how much of an ingredient (or contaminant) is in a product.”

Perhaps most telling is commentary from Pieter Cohen, MD, who last year wrote a scathing, widely publicized editorial for *The New England Journal of Medicine* that criticized the nutritional supplement industry. In the original *New York Times* article on Schneiderman's order and follow-up interview for [nutraingredients.com](http://nutraingredients.com), Cohen states that the extreme results of the herbal supplement investigation are “hard to believe,” due to the use of inaccurate DNA testing.

### Health Freedom = Empowerment

Even if Schneiderman's DNA test results are ultimately proven to be invalid, the damage to the supplement industry's reputation has already been done. But there may be a silver lining to the sensationalist media attacks: Consumers may gain more awareness that health freedom empowers intelligent supplement choices.

While Schneiderman scrambles to explain his flawed testing, health-conscious consumers can take their own steps to ensure the herbal supplements they take are as pure and healthy as possible. One way is to only buy supplements from manufacturers that provide independent third party laboratory assays. These assays provide objective proof that the product only contains what it's supposed to—assuring purity, potency and identity in each capsule without a state attorney general having to step in. For ongoing updates on how to keep the best health-enhancing supplements in your life, visit [NHA2015.com](http://NHA2015.com) today! ❖

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