

Advice 28-2013 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on risk assessment of the consumption of food supplements in particular those purchased on the internet.

The Scientific Committee has started a self tasking dossier to evaluate the potential risks of consumption of food supplements in particular those sold via internet. Possible risks are the presence of contaminants, possible interactions with other pharmaceutical drugs or therapeutic procedures (surgery, anesthesia, ...) and the biological/pharmacological properties of the constituents. The evaluation is based on a literature review. The aim is to inform the consumer, health professionals and operators of the risks associated with the consumption of certain food supplements.

The Scientific Committee has restricted the scope of the dossier to herbal food supplements, (pro)hormones, food supplements with a therapeutic indication, adulterated food supplements, food supplements with an adverse biological activity for health (alkaloids, ...) or containing toxic contaminants (heavy metals, mycotoxins, PAHs, ...) and food supplements under the Novel Food legislation.

The horizontal legislations for food are applicable to food supplements. From the inventory of the legislation it appears that there are shortcomings in the legislation on food supplements in Europe.

In Belgium, the legislation is more extensive and in continuous evolution. Mandatory notification of food supplements makes the control on the market easier. One of the challenges of the sale of food supplements via the internet is the control of the application of the legislation.

According to a literature review, food supplements may be contaminated and/or adulterated with chemical contaminants (As, Pb, Cd, PAHs, ...), stimulating substances (ephedrine, sibutramine, ...), (pro) hormones (stanozolol, methandienone, ...) and steroids 'new designer' (prostanazole). The presence of these substances in food supplements can induce adverse health effects. In addition, interactions with drugs or therapeutic procedures (anesthesia) have been reported. Food supplements containing nanomaterials must comply with the Novel Food legislation. There is uncertainty about the potential for bioaccumulation and potential health risks of these food supplements.

The Scientific Committee reviewed here advice 38-2006 on the control of food supplements in Belgium. Control actions were carried out by the FASFC to better control food supplements. The Scientific Committee noted that from an analytical point of view, the control of plant extracts is not easy.

The Scientific Committee recommends to make an inventory of analytical capacity to identify gaps, to realize a map of food supplements on the market and sold via the internet and collect consumption data of food supplements bought via the internet.

The Scientific Committee supports initiatives to implement and apply control systems of food supplements.

Finally, the Scientific Committee recommends to inform the consumers and health professionals on the risks associated with the sale of food supplements and particularly of food supplements sold via the internet.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french, respectively under the section "Wetenschappelijk Comité/Adviezen" and "Comité scientifique/Avis".