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FEATURE ARTICLE

Navigating Health Claims: Empowering Consumers in Fiji

In an age where social media is flooded with health trends and miracle products, the Consumer Council of Fiji continues to uncover instances of unsubstantiated claims surrounding the health benefits of different herbal based products. This phenomenon is not unique to Fiji but is part of a global trend where unscrupulous marketers exploit the allure of natural remedies. As consumers, it is imperative that we exercise caution, understanding the risks associated with blindly trusting unverified health claims and demanding a higher standard of transparency and accountability.

Exploring Plant-Based Products: A Critical Examination

Certain plant-based products, heralded for their perceived health advantages, have recently gained prominence on social media in Fiji. However, the absence of scientific substantiation behind these asserted benefits raises questions about the reliability and safety of such items. Our scrutiny has unveiled a noteworthy gap in nutritional information on the product labels, suggesting a potential omission of essential bacterial and nutrient analyses. This discovery underscores the importance of consumer discernment and informed decision-making, emphasizing the need for greater transparency with plant-based products.

Why Blind Trust Poses Risks?

Consumers should be wary of embracing health products without scrutinizing the evidence supporting their claims. Blind trust in unverified health assertions not only exposes individuals to potential health risks but also perpetuates a market culture where misinformation thrives. The absence of credible research is a glaring red flag, urging consumers to dig deeper before incorporating such products into their lifestyles.

Critical Considerations for Consumers

To navigate the maze of health claims effectively, consumers should adopt a proactive approach:

- **Scientific Scrutiny:** Demand scientific evidence supporting health claims. Peer-reviewed studies, lab analysis and reputable sources should form the basis of any health product's purported benefits.
- **Ingredient Transparency:** Legitimate health products should provide comprehensive information about their ingredients. Transparency in labelling allows consumers to make informed choices and understand the potential effects on their health.



- **Realistic Expectations:** Extreme and unrealistic promises should trigger skepticism. Genuine health improvements often require time and lifestyle changes. Instant or miraculous results without credible backing should be approached cautiously.

The Problem with Unsubstantiated Health Claims

The allure of quick fixes and extraordinary health benefits, as propagated by such products, poses a significant problem. Consumers, eager to enhance their well-being, often fall victim to these extravagant promises without critically evaluating the underlying science. The impact of this blind belief can be far-reaching.

Consumer Trust and the Role of Social Media

Consumers tend to place unwavering trust in the information presented on social media platforms. The rapid dissemination of health claims, often accompanied by compelling narratives or personal testimonials, creates an environment where misinformation spreads like wildfire. The immediacy and accessibility of social media make it a powerful tool, but when wielded irresponsibly, it can lead consumers down a path of misplaced trust and potential health risks.

The Dangers of Avoiding Medical Professionals

One of the primary issues stemming from the blind embrace of health claims is the tendency for individuals to bypass professional medical advice. Entrusting one's health to unverified products without consulting medical professionals can lead to undiagnosed or untreated conditions. The self-prescription of unproven remedies might provide a false sense of security, allowing underlying health issues to escalate unnoticed.

The Escalation of Unaddressed Issues

When consumers attempt to address health concerns with products making wild claims, the potential for these issues to spiral out of control increases. Delaying proper medical attention while relying on unverified remedies may exacerbate existing health conditions, leading to more significant complications in the long run.

The prevalence of unverified health claims of certain herbal/plant-based products not only endangers consumers' well-being but also erodes the trust between individuals and the healthcare system. The impact of blind belief in sensational health assertions can have severe consequences, emphasizing the urgent need for consumers to critically evaluate information, consult medical professionals, and advocate for a marketplace that prioritizes evidence-based health claims.



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