



## Council for Responsible Nutrition

1828 L Street, NW, Suite 900 • Washington, DC 20036-5114  
(202) 776-7929 • fax (202) 204-7980 • [www.crnusa.org](http://www.crnusa.org)

May 15, 2003

Timothy J. Muris, Esq.  
Chairman  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD  
Commissioner of Food and Drugs  
Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

### **Introduction**

The Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), founded in 1973, is a leading dietary supplement trade association representing ingredient suppliers and finished product manufacturers. Our members adhere to a strong code of ethics, comply with dosage limits and manufacture dietary supplements to high quality standards under good manufacturing practices.

CRN's mission is to improve the environment for member companies to responsibly market dietary supplements, by enhancing confidence among health care professionals, decision makers, media and consumers, and to sustain the future growth of the industry based on principles of sound science. Consistent with that mission, CRN is writing to urge the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to take enforcement action to prohibit the current “miracle cure” marketing claims for the dietary supplement, coral calcium. The most egregious claims originate from the books, infomercials, interviews and web sites of Robert Barefoot. As detailed below, Mr. Barefoot claims that coral calcium can cure or prevent virtually all degenerative diseases. Many other marketers of other coral calcium products repeat Mr. Barefoot's theories and claims. These claims are ubiquitous, appearing on a frequently aired television infomercial, on thousands of internet web sites, and in countless print ads, brochures and other promotional items.

As part of FDA's new Consumer Health Information initiative, both FDA Commissioner McClellan and FTC Chairman Muris have affirmed the agencies'

commitment to strong enforcement against false and misleading dietary supplement claims. Coral calcium is one of the most aggressively and pervasively promoted dietary supplements on the market today. Moreover, many of the claims have no scientific support and relate to serious life-threatening diseases. Permitting the continuation of such highly visible and fraudulent claims does grave disservice to consumers who turn to the marketplace for information about their health. This, in turn, undermines consumer confidence in the dietary supplement market as a whole, inevitably harming those responsible companies who provide quality products based on sound science.

Accordingly, CRN urges the FTC and FDA to take enforcement action to enjoin Robert Barefoot from disseminating these fraudulent health claims for coral calcium. As part of this action, the FTC and FDA should notify the many other companies marketing coral calcium products using Mr. Barefoot's unsubstantiated theories and claims that the agencies believe those claims are false and misleading in violation of federal law.

### **“Miracle Cure” Claims for Coral Calcium**

Coral calcium is the fossilized shells of sea creatures – i.e., dead coral – and is found both above ground (“stony fossilized”) and in the ocean (“marine grade”) in the vicinity of Okinawa, Japan.<sup>1</sup> It consists primarily of calcium carbonate, along with magnesium and numerous trace minerals, such as selenium and chromium. There are many different brands of coral calcium on the market, many of which are allegedly formulated by Robert Barefoot. One website alone lists nineteen different brands of coral calcium, some of which are enhanced with additional vitamins and minerals.<sup>2</sup> While coral calcium supplements undoubtedly provide the proven health benefits of calcium for bone health, the claims for coral calcium spread by Mr. Barefoot and his progeny go way beyond any existing scientific support.

For example, in audio and print interviews<sup>3</sup> and on his website,<sup>4</sup> Mr. Barefoot claims that over 200 degenerative diseases are caused by calcium and mineral deficiency, and that taking coral calcium will prevent or cure these diseases, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's. He asserts that coral calcium could cure 90% of all diseases within 2 years. He claims to have met “millions of people” who have been cured by coral calcium, e.g., to have seen patients with multiple sclerosis “get out of wheelchairs just by getting on coral.” He alludes, without any citations, to clinical studies at renowned research institutions (e.g., The Strang Cancer Center) and articles in prestigious medical journals (e.g., *Journal of the American Medical Association*), purportedly proving that calcium can reverse cancer. He accuses the medical community and pharmaceutical companies of keeping this information from the public in order to

---

<sup>1</sup> Holt, M.D., Steven, *Nature's Benefit from Coral Calcium, Sorting Facts from Fiction*, available at <http://www.wellnesspublishing.com/nbcc.html>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.thesupremecalciium.com/cc\\_bottles.html](http://www.thesupremecalciium.com/cc_bottles.html).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.coralcalciumsupply.com/robertbarefoot.html> (interview by Lee Davis); <http://www.coral1.com/bob.html> (interview by Kevin Trudeau).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cureamerica.net/>.

gain from the sale of unnecessary prescription drugs. ("Disease is very profitable; cures aren't."<sup>5</sup>).

As support for the miraculous properties of coral calcium, Mr. Barefoot points to the longevity of the people of Okinawa. According to Mr. Barefoot, the reason Okinawans live so long ("140 years and going"<sup>6</sup>) is because of the coral calcium in their diets. However, the investigators of the renowned Okinawan Centenarian Study, a population-based study of hundred-year-olds and other elderly in Okinawa, have disputed this assertion.<sup>7</sup> Compelled to issue a position statement in response to Mr. Barefoot, the investigators state:

Most of the health claims being made about coral calcium from Okinawa are based on the fact that the Okinawans are among the world's longest lived people and supposedly drink water containing coral calcium. Although Okinawa may have the world's highest concentration of centenarians, as well as extremely low mortality rates from diseases common in the West such as heart disease, breast and prostate cancers, the research shows that it has **very little to do with their drinking water**, as we explain in detail in our book "The Okinawa Program". Although drinking hard water (high mineral content that includes calcium, magnesium and other minerals) gives the Okinawans a boost in their calcium intakes, they still fall **far below the calcium intakes of most Western countries**. ... The average calcium intake in Okinawa is only about 500 mg a day . . . a far cry from claims of "100,000 mg of calcium a day" for the average Okinawan as claimed in a recent tv infomercial.<sup>8</sup>

These claims represent only a small number among many examples of the egregious, false and unsubstantiated claims that Mr. Barefoot and others use to market coral calcium products. In fact, Mr. Barefoot's promotional materials provide a textbook example of health fraud as described by the FTC and FDA in the consumer brochure *Miracle Health Claims: Add a Dose of Skepticism*.<sup>9</sup> That publication lists the types of claims that the FTC and FDA have encountered over and over again in fraudulent advertising and labeling, all of which appear in Mr. Barefoot's television infomercial and websites, and are repeated by thousands of other marketers of coral calcium. Examples include:

- Statements that the product is a quick and effective cure-all or diagnostic tool for a wide variety of ailments.
- Statements that suggest the product can treat or cure diseases.
- Promotions that use words like "scientific breakthrough," "miraculous cure," "exclusive product," "secret ingredient" or "ancient remedy."

---

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.coral-calcium-supplement.net/barefoot\\_coral\\_calcium\\_interview.htm](http://www.coral-calcium-supplement.net/barefoot_coral_calcium_interview.htm) (Lee interview).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.thesupremecalcium.com/bob\\_barefoot\\_interview.html](http://www.thesupremecalcium.com/bob_barefoot_interview.html) (Lee interview).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.okinawaprogram.com/index.html>. The goal of the Okinawa Centenarian Study is to uncover the genetic and lifestyle factors responsible for the longevity of the Okinawans.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.okinawaprogram.com/coral\\_calcium/coral-calcium.html](http://www.okinawaprogram.com/coral_calcium/coral-calcium.html).

<sup>9</sup> *Miracle Health Claims: Add a Dose of Skepticism* (joint FTC-FDA publication issued Sept. 2001), available at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/health/frdheal.htm>.

- Text that uses impressive-sounding terms.
- Undocumented case histories or personal testimonials by consumers or doctors claiming amazing results.

### **Marketplace Saturation of Deceptive Coral Calcium Claims**

As stated above, claims for coral calcium are ubiquitous. The coral calcium infomercial featuring Robert Barefoot was rated the most frequently aired infomercial in March 2003.<sup>10</sup> An online search using Google reveals over 150,000 links for coral calcium and over 100,000 for Robert Barefoot. Thousands of websites sell the supplement, many of which repeat Barefoot's theories and claims, sell his books, and make his television interviews available for downloading.

In addition, the campaign has attracted the attention of the public health community and the media, warning consumers that the claims lack any scientific basis. Reports have appeared in the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter,<sup>11</sup> Prevention Magazine,<sup>12</sup> Dr. Andrew Weil's website,<sup>13</sup> and on Good Morning America<sup>14</sup> debunking the cure-all claims for coral calcium. Recently, an article in Time Magazine opined that Mr. Barefoot's campaign was "one of the most successful scams of our age," and suggested that it was well past time for the government to take action.<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion**

CRN requests that the FTC and the FDA take appropriate enforcement action to end Mr. Barefoot's highly visible and deceptive marketing campaign for coral calcium, and to prevent Mr. Barefoot from further fraudulent activities. In addition, we urge the agencies to publicize this action and notify other entities marketing coral calcium through the use of such claims that they are in violation of federal law. Such action is consistent with the policy objectives of the agencies' recently announced Consumer Health Information for Better Nutrition Initiative, and with the goals of Operation Cure All and the Health Fraud Task Force. More importantly, strong enforcement action will be an critical step in reassuring consumers, the public health community, the industry and the media that the federal government will not tolerate health fraud of this magnitude, and

---

<sup>10</sup> *Weekly Top Infomercials* available at <http://www.jwgreensheet.com/rweek.asp>.

<sup>11</sup> "Coral Calcium: How To Sell a 5¢ supplement for \$1." UC Berkeley Wellness Letter.Com, February 2003, available at <http://www.berkeleywellness.com/html/ds/dsCoralCalcium.php>.

<sup>12</sup> "Spotlight on Coral Calcium: Four Tips to Help You Evaluate Supplement Ads," available at [http://www.prevention.com/cda/feature2002/0,4780,4534\\_P,00.html](http://www.prevention.com/cda/feature2002/0,4780,4534_P,00.html).

<sup>13</sup> "Counting on Coral Calcium?" available at [http://www.drweil.com/app/cda/drw\\_cda.html-command=TodayQA-pt=Question-questionId=73935](http://www.drweil.com/app/cda/drw_cda.html-command=TodayQA-pt=Question-questionId=73935).

<sup>14</sup> "False Hope? Experts Doubt Coral Calcium Infomercial Health Claims," available at [http://abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/Living/coral\\_calcium030511.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/Living/coral_calcium030511.html).

<sup>15</sup> "Coral Calcium: A Barefoot Scam," available at <http://www.time.com/time/columnist/jaroff/article/0,9565,433084,00.html>.

will provide a more fair and equitable marketplace for those dietary supplement companies who support their marketing claims with sound science.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annette Dickinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annette Dickinson, Ph.D.  
President

Special Counsel: Anne V. Maher, Esq.

cc: J. Howard Beales III  
Director  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
Federal Trade Commission

Mary Koelbel Engle, Esq.  
Director  
Division of Advertising Practices  
Federal Trade Commission

Lester M. Crawford, DVM, PhD  
Deputy Commissioner  
Food and Drug Administration

Joseph A. Levitt  
Director  
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition  
Food and Drug Administration

Daniel E. Troy, Esq.  
Chief Counsel  
Food and Drug Administration