

Do Not Use

Adulterated Chinese Herbal Anso Comfort Capsules

On February 13, 2001, the California Department of Health Services warned consumers to stop using the Chinese herbal supplement Anso Comfort Capsules because it contains the prescription tranquilizer chlordiazepoxide (LIBRIUM), which is a controlled substance. The ingredients for the product were imported from China and the capsules were manufactured in California.

We list chlordiazepoxide as *Do Not Use* in our book *Worst Pills, Best Pills*. Drugs in chlordiazepoxide's family (known as benzodiazepines) can cause drug dependence. If dependence has occurred from a benzodiazepine, the drug should not be stopped suddenly because of the risk of seizure and other withdrawal problems. We have no indication of how much chlordiazepoxide is contained in an Anso Comfort Capsule. If you have been using Anso Comfort you should consult a physician licensed to prescribe controlled substances in case it is necessary to withdraw from the drug slowly.

Advertising for Anso Comfort claims that it is a natural herbal dietary supplement useful for the treatment of a wide variety of diseases, including high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The advertising also claims that the product contains only Chinese herbal ingredients, and that consumers may reduce or stop their need for prescription medicines. Chlordiazepoxide is not listed on the label.

A San Francisco woman was

hospitalized in January with life-threatening low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) after consuming Anso Comfort Capsules. The woman had a history of diabetes and high blood pressure. The hospitalization may have been due to a drug interaction of the chlordiazepoxide and the prescribed medications for her other medical conditions. She is expected to recover.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will assist California authorities in the follow-up investigation and will monitor a recall throughout the U.S. Consumers who have any Anso Comfort should return the product to NuMeridian, located at 630 W. Duarte Road, No. 204, Arcadia CA 91007, or dispose of it safely to prevent exposure of children and pets.

This is the fourth article we have published since November 1998 regarding Chinese herbal medicines either containing dangerous plant products or adulterated with toxic metals or prescription drugs. In the November 1998 issue of *Worst Pills, Best Pills News* we wrote that the California Department of Health Services found excessive amounts of lead, arsenic and mercury in some of the 260 traditional Chinese medicines tested. Ephedrine (a stimulant), chlorpheniramine (an antihistamine), methyltestosterone (a male hormone), and phenacetin (a banned painkiller) were among the chemicals found in other products.

The diabetes drugs glyburide (DIABETA) and phenformin

(DBI), a drug banned in the U.S. in 1976 because of serious safety problems, have also been found in Chinese herbal products (see the April 2000 issue of *Worst Pills, Best Pills News*). In the July 2000 newsletter we reported on the ineffectual attempts of the FDA to protect the public from Aristolochia, an herb used in traditional Chinese medicine that is a source of aristolochic acid, known to be toxic to the kidneys.

Purposely "spiking" a product that is promoted as containing only herbs with a prescription drug is despicable, and a measure of the ethics of those who promote and sell untested products for unsubstantiated uses. The FDA, for all practical purposes, cannot prevent products such as Anso Comfort Capsules from being sold since the passage of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 that deregulated the dietary and herbal supplement industry and left consumers without protection from alternative healers who will sell anything they can put into a bottle.

What You Can Do

You should not use unregulated dietary and herbal supplements, including "traditional" Chinese herbal medications, as they present an unacceptable risk as well as poorly-documented evidence of benefit (this does not include multi-vitamin or folic acid supplements for pregnant women).