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The Sketchy Reality of "Sleep Tonics"

By Paige Towers • May 12, 2016 at 4:09pm

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There's no shortage of sleep supplements. Tonics, sprays and herbal remedies get prime retail in drug stores, wooing the groggy with claims of consequencefree, pleasant rest. Do some help? Sure. But many don't — and really — deliver on their promises. Still, that doesn't stop some wellbacked supplement companies from slapping convincing language on the bottle. And that's a problem.

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can't

Take Kolé Life Foods (now rebranded as), which offers bottled drinks intended to assist in various areas well being. One of those? You guessed it — a better night's sleep. As 's Jesse Singal beautifully laid out in the recent article,

the company is playing a dangerous game.

KoléTonics

New York Magazine

“A Bigtime Neuroscientist Threatened to Sue When I Asked About His Side Business Selling Supplement ‘Tonics,’”

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Kolé is a supplement manufacturer based in Baltimore that produces several types of nutritional supplements, including sleep “tonics.” As NYMag

points out, in the midst of a \$30 billion dollar industry, the company might not have stood out if it weren’t for the fact that it was founded by Dr. Bankole Johnson, the chair of the psychiatry department at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. Curious about the brand, Singal began poking around for answers about the efficacy of the products. Dr. Johnson and the Kole team made it clear that they were unhappy with the attention.

Now,

the supplements industry in the U.S. — which includes products such as vitamins, weight loss pills and herbal supplements — is lightly regulated.

Unlike prescription drugs, supplements go through little to no testing; instead, the responsibility (or lack thereof) of making sure that these supplements refer to the Food and Drug Administration’s guidelines is left to the manufacture of the supplement themselves. To this point, manufacturers are able to make claims that, as Singal writes, are free to “frequently misleading and sometimes potentially dangerous. “

Back to Kolé. One of their “tonics

, labeled as “Dreams.” A 12 pack sells on Amazon for \$36. The product claims to “support restful sleep” and “help prevent jet lag,” and then proceeds to list the benefits of three of its main ingredients, Vitamin B12, Magnesium and Melatonin. As Singal repeatedly highlights, once the company received negative attention for their claims,

the rhetoric used to describe this product and others shifted

, arguably to lessen the nature of the claims made. It’s dangerous stuff.

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As Singal points out, the conflict of interest regarding such companies with bigname backers has raised eyebrows recently. For instance, television star and Columbia University heart surgeon, Dr. Mehmet Oz,

has promoted many questionable nutritional supplements

with no small financial gain for himself.

Former Republican presidential candidate and neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson was linked with

the sketchy supplement

manufacturer Mannatech

during his campaign.

Although studies show that the general public places a high level of trust in the medical community, when these trusted members stamp their names on products that don't necessarily deliver what they claim to deliver, things can go wrong.

The moral here? If it sounds good to be true...

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