

The safety of health foods and the importance of their origin

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The origin of the ingredients in natural products is the most important factor ensuring quality, and thus safety and efficacy. In fact, the Japanese Pharmacopoeia states that the origin of crude drugs is the standard for judging propriety. However, the labeling on products sold as “health foods” (dietary supplements) is not always accurate or truthful. Recently, we revealed by chemical and DNA analyses that the ingredients used for the health foods (*Pueraria mirifica*, chondroitin sulfate, etc.) were not identical to those labeled. In the United States, Jiang *et al.* have reported that the origin of three of the 11 food supplement products of black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*) was an Asian *Actaea* species other than *A. racemosa*. Consumers cannot estimate the origin of natural products by external appearance if these products are sold as tablets or in capsule form. Therefore, we think that regulatory requirements should be implemented on the manufacturers of “health foods,” and that effective enforcement of these requirements is needed so that the ingredients in “health foods” are correctly listed.