

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

## Liver Injury from Herbal and Dietary Supplements



### June 2022: Liver Injury Rate Up From 7% to 20% in 10 Years

Emily Goss was a normal, healthy 23-year-old woman living in Amarillo, Texas, before she required a liver transplant on Christmas Day, in 2019. She had been rushed to Methodist Hospital in Dallas suffering from acute liver failure. The reason? Doctors believe it was an 'all natural' woman's dietary supplement, that claimed to "support hormonal balance, weight management, complexion, and fertility," which she had taken daily for several months.<sup>(1)</sup>



Goss stopped taking the supplement after Thanksgiving, when she began experiencing symptoms like abdominal pain, fatigue and the white of her eyes turning yellow. However doctors' speculated that the damage may have already been done as she was in acute liver failure and needed to be placed to the top of a liver transplant list.

"Many of these dietary supplements are advertised as natural and healthy," said Dr. Jeffrey Weinstein, the medical director of liver transplantation. "While acute liver failure is rare, about **30 to 40% of the deadly cases** are linked to herbal or dietary supplements," Weinstein said.<sup>(1,2)</sup>

A special 2-day event was held on May 4-5, 2015, in Bethesda, Maryland, to review the increase liver injuries observed from dietary supplements. Research shows that it now accounts for **20% of all liver toxicity cases** in the USA.<sup>(3)</sup> This is an **increase from 7% just 10 years ago**, according to an analysis by the Drug-Induced Liver Injury Network.<sup>(4)</sup> The liver injury can be severe and lead to death or the need for emergency liver transplantation.<sup>(5)</sup>

Many supplements contain active ingredients that can have strong effects in the body. Always be alert to the possibility of a bad reaction, especially when taking a new product.<sup>(6)</sup>

Liver injury is not the only reason people end up in hospital after taking dietary supplements. In the USA alone, it is estimated that **23,005 emergency department visits** per year, resulting in about **2,154 hospital admissions**, were due to bad reactions from dietary supplements. The majority of these involved young adults between the ages of 20 and 34 years.<sup>(7)</sup>



Goss was shocked. “I just couldn’t believe that a supplement could cause something so life-threatening,” she said.<sup>(1)</sup>

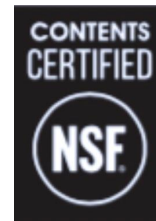
So what is the real issue? While FDA-approved medications must be shown to be both safe and effective, dietary supplements do not have to meet this requirement.

This is an example of the magnitude of the problem. On Dec 26, 2019, the U.S. Department of Justice Court ordered a New York-based company to stop distributing **adulterated** dietary supplements and **to recall all products** made and sold for the previous **6 years** (between January 2013 and November 2019). This was a massive recall because this company made supplements for over **800 different brands**.<sup>(8)</sup> How many consumers health were put at risk because they were not aware of this one recall?

What is the important takeaway message? As Dr. Weinstein advises, “use good caution...” Before buying any supplement, **look for the NSF mark** on the label. This confirms the product has been independently certified to ensure the contents in every supplement match the label, are present at the level specified and **free of harmful contaminants**. Certification by an independent 3rd party agency (like NSF) is your key to making sure that the products you use are safe.

### Did you know?

- In Canada, **less than 10 manufacturers** have their supplements tested and certified by NSF.
- NSF certifies all the Nutrilite brand’s manufacturing facilities, and each product, to ensure the contents in every supplement match the label, and are present at the level specified.



### References:

1. <https://nypost.com.2020/01/03>
2. <https://www.health.com/mind-body/acute-liver-failure-dietary-supplement>
3. *Hepatology*. 2017 Jan; 65(1): 363–373.
4. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/about-niddk/meet-director/directors-update/2014-spring/research-updates>
5. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/news/meetings-workshops/2015/liver-injury-herbal-dietary-supplements> 5-15
6. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/WYNTK-Consumer/#h4Nutrients> 2019, 11, 101
7. *N Engl J Med*. 2015;373(16):1531-1540
8. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/federal-district-court-orders-new-york-company-stop-distributing-adulterated-and-misbranded>