Inside the murky world of the vitamin industry

IT promises health and vitality but Australia’s $4.7 billion vitamin industry is facing allegations of insider trading, underpayment of workers and unproven health claims.

A News Corp investigation has found as share prices soar and Chinese consumers flock to Australian vitamin brands to avoid contamination risks, two of our biggest vitamin companies — Swisse and Vitaco — are now Chinese owned.

We can reveal that a Chinese based subsidiary of Shanghai Pharmaceuticals that now owns Vitaco was shut down in 2007 for making tainted leukaemia drugs blamed for causing leg pains and partial paralysis in 200 patients.

Vitaco makes Healtheries, Nutra-life, Abundant Earth, Biolane,
Musashi and BodyTrim.

People connected to Shanghai Pharmaceuticals officials are being investigated by ASIC for insider trading connected to the 2016 takeover, although no charges have been laid.

BABY DIETS: The first 1000 days are critical

PALEO PETE: Doctors shoot down celebrity chef’s claims

![Image of Blackmores Vitamin C](https://www.heraldsun.com.au/lifestyle/health/inside-the-mur.../bd9bab927e6fdc9ca925da8c2b7bc5cd?memtype=anonymous)

Vitamin C is sourced from China. Picture: Supplied

News Corp has also uncovered that almost all of the vitamin C and glucosamine used comes from China.

Swisse and Blackmores both source these ingredients from China.

Vitaco sources amino acids, sweeteners, acids and herbs from
China and Sanofi, which makes Nature's Own, Ostelin and Cenovis vitamins in its Brisbane plant, also sources some ingredients from China.

Blackmores says the global food and nutritional supplements industries are heavily reliant on China as the source of almost all of the world’s vitamin C and that Australia does not grow or make most of the ingredients for other supplements.

Even though they have different brand names many of the Australian supplements are produced in the same pill manufacturing factories — Lipa Pharmaceuticals in Sydney and Catalent in Melbourne (which was recently bought by Blackmores).

Chinese products have long been associated with health scares, including the doctoring of baby formula with melamine in 2008 that killed six babies and made 300,000 ill.

In 2015 and 2017 frozen berries from China had to be withdrawn from the Australian market after they were linked to a serious Hepatitis A outbreak.

In January, China removed 1400 baby formula products from its shelves as part of a safety overhaul.

Aside from the Chinese concerns, some vitamin companies have been caught underpaying their workers. In 2015 the Fair Work Commission found Nature’s Care and Natralab Australia Pty Ltd had underpaid backpackers a total of $98,499.

The company says the Fair Work Ombudsman “acknowledged Nature’s Care’s commitment to rectifying the contraventions and the company is committed to honouring all Australian workplace
laws and paying our employees fairly for their work.”

After major US Vitamin companies were forced to cease selling vitamin and herbal supplements found to contain no active ingredients and scientists found fish oil pills were rancid, News Corp paid to have Australian supplements tested.

The chemical testing carried out by Sharp and Howells found while our vitamins did contain the products listed on the labels, they were in lower than advertised quantities in one case.

One of the ten Healthy Care Glucosamine HCL 1000mg tablets tested had less than the stated ingredient.

Nature’s Care which makes the product said it has strict quality
controls and “we assure our customers that we do not release any product that is outside our (standards) which for Glucosamine is between 90 and 110 per cent”.

Health experts claim one of the biggest problems with the vitamin industry is the unproven claims they are allowed to make on their labels to entice consumers to buy the products.

Earlier this year the government changed the rules governing what Vitamin companies can claim on their labels in a move that has enraged consumer and science experts.

Companies can now choose to label their products with over 1000 non evidence-based indications including bizarre claims like Disinhibit Water, Tonify the kidney, Harmonise the middle burner.
(Spleen and Stomach), Moisten Dryness in the Triple Burner and Nourish Yin.

Monash University preventive health expert Professor Ken Harvey says there is no scientific evidence to back the claims and when the companies are challenged by the nation’s medicines regulator to provide proof they can’t — but no penalties are applied.

Last year the nation’s medicines regulator upheld 80 per cent of the more than 400 complaints about the claims made on vitamin bottles but he says the TGA did little to get the dodgy products off the shelves or ensure the companies corrected their labels, he says.

A spokeswoman for the TGA said the new framework for advertising complaints provides for a broader range of tools, and penalties where needed, to achieve compliance.

Swisse says it is funding clinical trials to test its products.
BIZARRE CLAIMS PERMITTED ON VITAMIN BOTTLES

Relieve clammy/sweaty palms and soles

Relieve feelings of general malaise/general debility

Aid/assist expulsion of intestinal gas

Descend liver Yang

Disinhibit Water

Disseminate Lung Qi

Tonify kidney
Harmonise middle burner (Spleen and Stomach)

Moisten Dryness in the Triple Burner

Nourish Yin

Open body orifices

Regulate Chong channels