

Juices with added extras may be harmful

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Fruit juices containing added extras do not have significant health benefits and may be harmful to some people, Australia's leading consumer group says.

An investigation by Choice has found juice with extras such as aloe vera, echinacea, ginkgo, ginseng, spirulina, barley grass and wheat grass did not contain enough of the extracts to have any meaningful health impact.

Choice spokesman Christopher Zinn said the low levels could actually be an advantage because some extracts at higher doses were not necessarily safe.

He said ginkgo could interfere with other medications such as anticoagulants while anyone suffering high blood pressure should take ginseng only in small doses and pregnant women should not take it at all.

'In our view the use of medicinal herbs in products like juices should be banned unless specific approval is given after a proper safety assessment, an idea which our food regulator has abandoned,' he said in a statement on Wednesday.

Juices promoting extra antioxidants were also a concern, with no evidence that taking antioxidants as a supplement provided any preventative benefit for cancer or heart disease.

'Apple juice has only 14 per cent of the antioxidant capacity you'd get from actually eating an apple,' he said.

'The juice market is rife with claims which are not matched by reality and it's often best to stick to the whole fruit or vegetable.'

Mr Zinn said the juices with added extras were also more expensive than those without.

'Many of the products, which go by names such as Kickstart, Energy Lift and Green Recovery, are mostly inexpensive apple juice with a few added extras,' he said.

One juice from Berri which claimed to contain 'over 30 per cent of your daily needs' of omega-3 fats in fact contained only eight per cent of the Heart Foundation's recommended daily dose for men, he said.

