

Ironic Effects of Dietary Supplementation: Illusory Invulnerability

Created by Taking Dietary Supplements Licenses Health-risk Behaviors

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Abstract

The prevalence of dietary supplement use and the health status of individuals have an interesting asymmetrical relationship. Building on the notion of licensing, we argue that taking dietary supplements may create an illusory sense of invulnerability that disinhibits unhealthy behaviors because such supplements are perceived as conferring health advantages. Participants taking a dietary supplement (actually a placebo) exhibited the licensing effect across multiple forms of health-related behavior: they expressed less desire to engage in exercise and more desire to engage in hedonic activities, preferred a buffet over an organic meal (Experiment 1), and walked less to benefit their health (Experiment 2). The findings supported the role of perceived invulnerability as an underlying mechanism for those effects. This paper provides thought-provoking evidence of how a license associated with taking dietary supplements may operate within cycles involving behaviors that protect and endanger health.

