

Power of pomegranate juiced up, judge says

POM Wonderful misled public, court rules

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Pomegranate juice doesn't prevent prostate cancer, stave off heart disease or scare away erectile dysfunction, a U.S. judge has ruled in the latest warning to companies exaggerating the health benefits of their products.

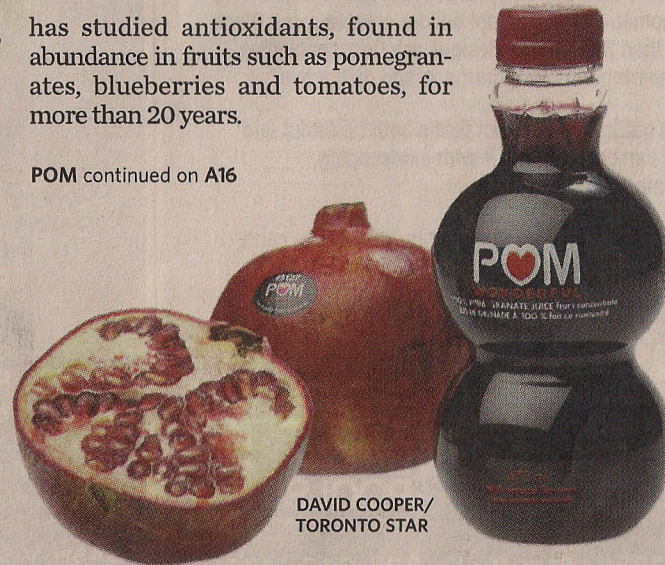
A Federal Trade Commission administrative law judge upheld a complaint that POM Wonderful misled consumers in 12 of 540 advertisements which made those claims.

"We are allowed to make more generalized health claims that the products are healthy and good for heart health, erectile health and prostate health," said Corey Martin, a spokesman for Roll Global, which makes the juice.

"To claim at this time that taking pomegranate juice is the magic bullet that is going to cure these diseases is wrong," said Venket Rao, a University of Toronto nutrition professor who

has studied antioxidants, found in abundance in fruits such as pomegranates, blueberries and tomatoes, for more than 20 years.

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Pomegranate juice no 'magic bullet'

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Lab studies have demonstrated that antioxidants are beneficial in chronic ailments such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis by protecting cell components from destructive molecules.

POM's research, published in more than 70 peer-reviewed jour-

nals, has shown some compounds in pomegranate inhibit cancer cells and prevent its spread.

"The potential for antioxidants is there, without a doubt," Rao said. "But they've only shown this in cell culture, which doesn't mean it will happen in humans. They are stretching it too far."

The ruling may have a catastroph-

ic effect on the product.

"The packaging of POM is brilliant, it has premium position in grocery stores," said Ken Wong, a Queen's University marketing professor. "But I think they didn't need to make the claims as directly as they did and by doing so they have absolutely destroyed their brand."

It's unclear where POM Wonder-

ful stands in Canada. The company didn't answer questions about its advertising here. The product is currently being reclassified from a natural health product to a food, according to Health Canada, but regulations on health claims must be substantiated for both.

Medical claims can have a huge impact on sales.

"In the gum industry, sales skyrocketed when it was found out that chewing gum was a reasonable stop-gap when you can't brush your

teeth," Wong said.

But there has been a crackdown lately on health claims in the U.S.

In April, Ferrero lost a \$3 million class-action lawsuit because it said Nutella, a hazelnut spread, was part of a healthy breakfast. The suit revealed the healthy part came from the bread and milk, not the Nutella.

And last week Skechers settled out of court for \$40 million after it claimed its round-soled shoes helped people lose weight and tone lower body muscles.