



## Short Safety Subject

Short Safety Subjects are provided by the Public Safety Business Center, Fort Bragg, NC. Our intent is to provide safety topics for the purpose of increasing safety awareness and improving safety performance. Additional Short Safety Subjects are available on the PSBC Business Management Web Site at:

[www.bragg.army.mil/psbc-bm/PubsAndForms/ShortSafetySubjects.htm](http://www.bragg.army.mil/psbc-bm/PubsAndForms/ShortSafetySubjects.htm)

### **Ephedra Warning**

Recently, a soldier died tragically during physical training from an apparent fatal cardiac event. He was likely taking a dietary supplement containing a combination of the herbs Ma Huang and Guarana. The use of supplements has also been shown to increase the risk of heat injury. Current DoD/Army regulations do not prohibit the use of dietary supplements by soldiers and furthermore, these products are unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). However, dietary supplements can cause adverse health effects and affect soldier performance. Therefore, soldiers must be informed consumers and knowledgeable about dietary supplements.

Dietary supplements marketed as weight loss products, performance enhancers, or “fat burners” may contain potentially dangerous ingredients, that given the right conditions may result in permanent injury or death. Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict who is most likely to suffer adverse health effects from a dietary supplement.

Of concern are the supplements containing Ma Huang or Ephedra, with is a naturally occurring form of the drug Ephedrine. Dietary supplements containing ephedra (also called ma huang) claim to aid weight loss and provide extra energy. Ephedra has clearly been shown to elevate blood pressure, increase heart rate, and cause nervousness and insomnia - all of which could be interpreted as feeling more energetic, although this isn't the same as providing extra energy for higher performance. At higher doses ephedra can cause strokes, heart attacks and seizures. Exercise and dehydration increase the risk of these effects, and any soldier with high blood pressure is more likely to suffer these adverse effects. Finally, if a soldier is taking an allergy, asthma, or cold medication containing ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine, they should never take ephedra, as these compounds in combination significantly increase the risk of adverse effects. Guarana, another stimulant, is a naturally occurring caffeine-like substance. Both Ma Huang and Guarana, either alone or in combination, can induce fatal heart rhythms under the right conditions. Bottom line - although these dietary supplements are legal for sale, they generally are not a safe choice for active soldiers.

Commanders and leaders at all levels to identify their soldiers using these supplements and strongly discourage their use under any circumstances. They absolutely should not be used during strenuous activity, and/or in elevated heat conditions. The combination could be fatal. Contact your unit's command surgeon for further information. You may also visit <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/Wellness/Dietary.aspx> for further information on supplements. In the end the best approach to physical conditioning is the old fashioned way – hard and supervised physical training with no – no – artificial stimulants/enhancers.