



Reservist Alleges Tainted Diet Pill Caused Insomnia Rage, Five Days in Mental Ward



By SUSAN DONALDSON JAMES | ABC News – Fri, Jan 10, 2014 10:41 PM EST

Sainah Theodore, serving in the Army Reserves and with dreams of being an officer, says she turned to an herbal diet supplement that she had used before with success to help her lose weight and be fit for a combat job.

But in a lawsuit, she alleges the Natural Lipo-X pills she bought at a health food store in New York City in December 2012 contained illegal chemicals not listed on its label, which prevented her from sleeping for six days. As a result, she says she went into a psychological rage that cost her not only her career aspirations but tens of thousands of dollars of property damage and lost wages.

"Aside from paranoid, aggressive, nasty text messages she sent to her mother all day, she was picking fights with strangers in a movie theater," said her lawyer, Brian C. Pascale. "She said she heard voices and ... was driving aggressively and reacting erratically."

After a week of rage-driven episodes that came to a head on Dec. 19 with the physical destruction of her home, Theodore was committed involuntarily to a hospital mental ward for five days, according to a lawsuit filed in the state Supreme Court of Kings County on Jan. 6.

Theodore, 26, is suing the [Natural Health Food Center](#) in Brooklyn and its owner, Adalgisa Garcia. Theodore's lawyers say they are trying to find the manufacturers of Natural Lipo-X to hold them accountable.

The product is no longer available on the store's website, but it is described elsewhere online as a "[a lipotropic formula designed to amplify your fat burning efforts by increasing fat metabolism and helping to control hunger.](#)"

The lawsuit alleges Garcia, who uses the title "Dr." before her name, is not a medical doctor.

"She passes herself off as a doctor, which makes people trust her," said Marc. S. Ullman, a lawyer who specializes in food and drug litigation and is helping with Theodore's case.

[Garcia's website](#) states she is a "certified natural health professional" with a doctoral degree in neuropathy. It also says she obtained a degree in "general medicine and family medicine" at Nordestana University in the Dominican Republic.

But, said Pascale, "I found no doctors registered under her name with the New York State Department of Health."

Theodore's lawyers said they tested Theodore's remaining diet pills, and a lab report from Oregon's Flora Research Laboratories dated April 4, 2013, obtained by ABCNews.com shows they contained two chemical additives that are not approved by the FDA for over-the-counter dietary supplements and are not listed in the bottle's label of ingredients: sibutramine and phenolphthalein.

The FDA has issued numerous recalls when products are found to contain sibutramine and phenolphthalein. Its web page, "[Questions and Answers about FDA's Initiative Against Contaminated Weight Loss Products](#)" lists 72 [tainted dietary supplement](#) products that contain undeclared active ingredients, including eight that contain both sibutramine and phenolphthalein.

[Sibutramine](#), a stimulant, was voluntarily removed from the market by the manufacturer in 2010 after the FDA asked for its withdrawal because of associated heart attack and stroke risks.

[Phenolphthalein](#) was an ingredient in some over-the-counter laxative products until 1999 when the FDA reclassified the drug as "not generally recognized as safe and effective" after studies showed it was potentially carcinogenic and can damage or cause mutations to DNA.

[Natural Lipo-X](#) was not named on a list of diet supplements that the FDA reported as being "tainted."

"Consumers may unknowingly take products laced with varying quantities of approved prescription drug ingredients, controlled substances, and untested and unstudied pharmaceutically active ingredients," says the FDA on its website, Tainted Weight Loss Products. "These deceptive products can harm you! Hidden ingredients are increasingly becoming a problem in products promoted for weight loss."

Before it was removed from the market, sibutramine carried a label warning of possible side effects: "lack of sleep, agitation and aggressive behavior," said Ullman. "Patients were warned that if you can't sleep for an extended period of time, to stop immediately."

Theodore is seeking an undetermined amount of damages, but Pascale said she racked up \$21,000 in property losses, a \$1,400 ambulance bill and \$14,000 in lost wages from the military and potential bonuses.

In addition to serving in the Reserves, Theodore had a job in hospital admissions and was going to school full-time to study sociology.

ABCNews.com called the Natural Health Food Center and was told Adalgsa Garcia was "unavailable." She has not yet filed her response with the court.

"We have no comment," said a man who identified himself as Kennedy Angeliz. "Get in contact with the other party."

According to the [Daily News](#), which first reported the story, Angeliz is the store manager's son. He told the newspaper that Theodore had been fasting on the pills.

"We can't leave the store to see the customer eats well," he told the newspaper. "The insurance is handling this. That's all I will say."

Theodore's paranoia and aggression came to a head in a "road rage" incident on Dec. 19, 2012, said her lawyer, Pascale.

"She got stopped in the middle of a busy intersection and started arguing with people," he said. "Finally a cop came and gave her a ticket."

The lawsuit alleges that Theodore drove home and then went into another rage with her mother and tore the screen door off her own house. "This is a strong lady," he said.

"Then, she proceeds to take a knife out on the mattresses in the house," said Pascale. "She wasn't just stabbing pillows. She was brandishing a knife on her mother, who called 911."

Pascale said Theodore was taken to Queens Medical Center by ambulance and was admitted to its mental ward. "She had no choice," he said.

The first thing the medical staff did was sedate Theodore, according to Pascale.

"When she was awake and felt normal, she asked, 'Why am I here?'" he said. "The hospital, after talking to Theodore, realized it was the pills."

Today, Theodore is doing "pretty well," said Ullman. "But she is not doing well as far as her military career is concerned."

Theodore wants to be an officer, so she must accumulate service points, he said. Getting an assignment in an active combat zone is important for her goal.

At virtually the same time as the rage incidents, Theodore was short-listed and on standby for an assignment, say her lawyers.

"She was concerned about her weight and that's why she took the product," said Ullman. "When this happened, she had to withdraw from the unit. She doesn't know of another opportunity to deploy, especially after the sequester and the phase-out in Afghanistan."

Theodore's legal team says it has still has not been able to find out who manufactures Natural Lipo-X.

"They are probably made in a facility outside the U.S. with no controls," said Ullman. "One batch they have thrown something extra into. We will attempt to find out, and if we can, we plan to hold them accountable."

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