

Dietary Supplements

D I E T A R Y S U P P L E M E N T S

What are dietary supplements?

- They are products people use in addition to the foods they eat. They include vitamins, minerals, herbs, and amino acids. They are sometimes called "natural" products.
- They may come as pills, tablets, capsules, liquids, or powders.
- By law, companies that make these products cannot claim they prevent, treat, or cure disease. For example—a product cannot claim that it can "cure cancer" or "treat arthritis."

****The choice to use a dietary supplement can be a good decision that provides health benefits. However, under certain circumstances, you may not need them for good health or they may even create risks.*

Can dietary supplements be taken instead of eating certain foods? No

- Supplements should not be taken to replace eating a variety of foods. It is important to eat a healthy diet that includes a variety of foods. Dietary supplements are taken to improve the diets of some people. While you need a certain amount of nutrients, too much of some nutrients can cause problems.

Should I check with my doctor before using a supplement? Yes

- If you have health problems and take these products, you may be placing yourself at risk. Persons who are pregnant, nursing a baby, or have medical problems, such as, diabetes, or high blood pressure, should talk to their doctor first.

Is it safe to take dietary supplements with other medications?

- You should talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse first. Taking a number of different dietary supplements or using these products together with medication (prescription or over-the-counter) can sometimes have bad effects, even death. Some of these products may also be very bad to take before surgery.

Does the FDA control dietary supplements? No

The FDA does not approve dietary supplements before they are sold.

- Companies are in charge of making sure their products are safe before they sell them.
- FDA can only judge how safe or effective a supplement is *after* it is for sale.
- Then FDA must show that the product is unsafe before it can limit the product's use.

Where can I get information about a certain product?

- Contact the company that makes the product directly.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

What Dietary Supplement Labels Must Show:

- Name of product
- How much/many in package
- The supplement's effect on the body, followed by these words: "This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease."
- Directions for use
- Supplement facts panel (serving size, amount, and active ingredient)
- Other ingredients
- Name and address of maker, packer, or distributor. Write to this address for more product information.

Dietary Supplements(cont.)

How do I report a problem or illness caused by one of these products?

- Call 1-800-FDA-1088.
- Go to the Medwatch website at
<http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/report/consumer/consumer.htm>.

Tips on searching the web for information on dietary supplements.

Ask yourself the following question:

- Who runs the web site? (government, college, medical community)
- What is the purpose of the web site? (is it to educate or just sell the product)
- What is the source of the information on the web site and does it have any references? (reviewed in scientific journals by experts)
- Is the information current? (check the date to see when it was posted or updated)

To Learn More...

Food and Drug Administration
FDA's Office of Women's Health website: www.fda.gov/womens