

IS A DIETARY SUPPLEMENT THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR ME? LEADER'S GUIDE



Understanding Dietary Supplements

People often take dietary supplements without knowing exactly what they are taking. Sometimes they get recommendations from friends or they are influenced by television commercials or magazine advertisements. The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 prohibits manufacturers from claiming their products "treat, cure, or prevent." However, they can make other claims. Since its enactment, there has been a significant increase in the number of reported poisonings associated with dietary supplements and other products (vitamins, minerals, essential oils, and homeopathic remedies). Today an estimated 50% of American adults consume dietary supplements. Dietary supplements is a billion industry. Unlike foods and prescription drugs there is limited regulatory oversight by government agencies.

What You Need to Know

- Dietary supplements are products taken by mouth that contain "dietary ingredients" intended to supplement the diet.
- They contain one or more dietary ingredients, including vitamins, minerals, herbs, botanicals, amino acids, and substances such as enzymes, organ tissues, extracts, glandulars, and metabolites.
- Dietary supplements come in a variety of forms, such as a pill, capsule, tablet, powder, energy bar, or drink. Supplements should be taken by mouth.
- Dietary supplements are labeled on the front panel as being a supplement.
- Dietary supplements are not intended to treat, diagnose, slow, prevent, or cure diseases.
- Unlike prescription drugs, dietary supplements are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration for safety and effectiveness.
- Taking a combination of supplements or using these products with prescribed medicines could be harmful or even life threatening.
- Herb/Botanical supplements may pose risks.
- If you are considering taking a dietary supplement, first talk to your doctor to see whether he or she has any recommendations.
- Dietary supplements are not intended to treat, diagnose, mitigate, prevent, or cure disease or replace food in a diet. Following My Plate recommendations may eliminate the need for dietary supplements.

How to Recognize a Supplement

Look for the Supplement Facts panel on the packaging.

Supplement Facts		
Serving Size 1 Tablet		
	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Vitamin A (as retinyl acetate and 50% as beta-carotene)	5000 IU	100%
Vitamin C (as ascorbic acid)	60 mg	100%
Vitamin D (as cholecalciferol)	400 IU	100%
Vitamin E (as dl-alpha tocopheryl acetate)	30 IU	100%
Thiamin (as thiamin mononitrate)	15 mg	100%
Riboflavin	1.7 mg	100%
Niacin (as niacinamide)	20 mg	100%
Vitamin B ₆ (as pyridoxine hydrochloride)	2.0 mg	100%
Folate (as folic acid)	400 mcg	100%
Vitamin B ₁₂ (as cyanocobalamin)	6 mcg	100%
Biotin	30 mcg	10%
Pantothenic Acid (as calcium pantothenate)	10 mg	100%

Other ingredients: Gelatin, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, FD&C Yellow No. 6, propylene glycol, propylparaben, and sodium benzoate.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Quick Tips

- The term *natural* doesn't mean safe.
- Safety is important!
- Think twice. Talk to your doctor about quick fixes.
- Learn to spot false claims.
- Consider potential side effects.
- Take a list of your supplements with you to the doctor.
- Choose supplements that follow the Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) set by the Food and Drug Administration FDA

Best Time To Take Supplements

- *For best absorption, supplements should be taken at certain times.*
- *Supplements may interact or influence the dosage needed for prescription drugs.*
- *Some supplements are best taken with foods.*

Practice Good Consumer Savy

- *Watch for watch for misleading or false statements.*
- *Don't assume if a supplement doesn't help you; it won't hurt you.*
- *Be informed. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicines (established 2015) offers a wealth of information. <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm>*
- *Other sources of reliable information include National Institute of Health's Office of Dietary Supplements and FDA websites.*

Vitamins, Minerals, Nutrients

Vitamin B complex
Multiple vitamin
Vitamin C
Vitamin D
Vitamin E
Beta carotene
Calcium
Omega 3 fatty acids
Folic acid
Zinc
Iron

Botanicals and Other Substances

Acidophilus
Black cohosh
Gotu kola
Garlic
Ginkgo biloba
Fish oil
Glucosamine chondroitin
Saint John's wort
Saw palmetto
Ginger
Echinacea

Potential Side Effects

Some supplements may interact with prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Taking a combination of supplements or using these products with medications could, under certain circumstances, produce adverse effects, some of which could be life threatening. Examples include calcium, magnesium, vitamin K, St. John's Wort, and vitamin E. Dietary supplements should be treated like all medicines and kept out of reach of small children.

Questions to Ask Before Taking Supplements

1. Do I need this supplement?
2. Do I know that this supplement is safe?
3. Does this supplement interact with any drug or food I am consuming?
4. Do I know that this supplement works?
5. Can I afford this supplement?
6. Do I know enough about this supplement?
7. Does the label provide a way to contact the company?
8. How does my doctor feel about this?
9. Does this product claim to be a "miracle cure" or "new discovery"?
10. Could this product interact with prescription medications?

To report serious side effects, call (800) FDA-1088 or visit the FDA online at www.fda.gov/medwatch/report/consumer/consumer.htm.

Resources

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
American Association for Poison Control Centers

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