

## What Do Consumers Need to Know About Dietary Supplements?

Many people use dietary supplements to improve their health. Reasons that people use dietary supplements are to:

- Ensure adequate intake of nutrients
- Make up for poor eating habits
- Take advantage of certain reported health benefits
- Feel healthier and stronger

Dietary supplements can provide health benefits, but these products are not risk free. Under certain circumstances, supplement use may result in unexpected consequences including possible adverse reactions. It also is possible that these supplements may not be necessary based on your health and the foods you eat.

Before you choose a dietary supplement, talk with your pharmacist or doctor. You already know that your pharmacist is your neighborhood expert on medicines. But you might not be aware that your pharmacist also can answer questions about dietary supplements and help you use them correctly.

## What Is a Dietary Supplement and What Are the Benefits of Using Supplements?

There are many types of dietary supplements. Examples include:

- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Herbal medicines
- Amino acids
- Botanicals
- Enzymes

Dietary supplements are intended to provide additional nutrients to help augment nourishment you get from food and meet total daily nutrients intake needs. These products are not designed to replace the foods that are important to a healthy diet. Dietary supplements are manufactured and sold in a variety of forms such as tablets, capsules, and softgels. Even though they may look like medicine, dietary supplements cannot make claims to treat, prevent, or cure a disease.

The goal of using dietary supplements is to help you get an adequate amount of essential nutrients for your body to function properly. However, too much of certain vitamins and minerals can become a problem. Reliable information on dietary supplements and safe limits to use are available from the organizations listed in the Helpful Resources section. You also can ask your pharmacist for advice on recommended nutrient amounts.

## Helpful Resources About Good Nutrition and Dietary Supplements

### Medline Plus

Provides information on vitamin and mineral supplements as well as herbal remedies.

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vitamins.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vitamins.html)

### National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

Presents evidence-based and scientific information on complementary and integrative medicine.

<https://nccih.nih.gov>

### Nutrient Recommendations: Dietary Reference Intakes

Addresses dietary requirements with in-depth information for health professionals and consumers.

[https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health\\_Information/Dietary\\_Reference\\_Intakes.aspx](https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/Dietary_Reference_Intakes.aspx)

### Nutrition.gov

Provides reliable information on choosing healthful food and proper use of dietary supplements.

[www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov)

### Office of Dietary Supplements

Provides evidence-based fact sheets on the most commonly used dietary supplements.

<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/list-all>



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# Using Vitamins, Herbs, and Other Dietary Supplements Wisely



## Are There Any Risks Associated With Using Dietary Supplements?

Some dietary supplements may interact—or interfere—with certain prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines (also called OTC or nonprescription medicines), or foods. Supplements, medicines, and foods may interact in different ways. It is important to talk with your pharmacist before using a dietary supplement. Keep in mind that interactions can happen to anyone. However, specific life stages and or events may influence potential risk for interactions and you should consult your pharmacist or doctor, such as:

- Pregnancy
- Nursing (breastfeeding) a baby
- Taking certain medicines
- Chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease
- Kidney or liver disease

For example, people who use the blood-thinning medicine warfarin should not take dietary supplements that contain vitamin K or vitamin E because these vitamins may interfere with the desired effect of warfarin. St. John's wort supplements that contain hyperforin may reduce the effectiveness of birth control pills and many medicines used to treat heart disease, depression, seizures, HIV, and cancer. Dietary supplements that contain calcium may disrupt the action of certain antibiotics.

In some cases, dietary supplements may have an unwanted effect during surgery. Be sure to tell your doctor and other health care providers (for example, your dentist) about the vitamins, minerals, herbals, or any other supplements you take so they can properly plan well ahead of any scheduled surgery or procedures.

## What Sources Should I Trust When Selecting Dietary Supplements?

Your pharmacist can help you check whether the product is from a reputable manufacturer that follows high-quality standards. Does the label look like the product is from a dependable manufacturer with a toll-free phone number and website for more information? Do claims seem exaggerated or too good to be true? Your pharmacist can help you find current information on the supplement to separate hype from the facts.

Check to see if the dietary supplement carries the "USP Verified Dietary Supplement" mark, which signifies that it meets the strict criteria of the United States Pharmacopeia (USP); this scientific, nonprofit organization establishes federally recognized standards for the quality of medicines and dietary supplements. USP also offers voluntary verification services to help ensure dietary supplement quality, purity, and potency. The USP mark on product labels, packaging, and promotional materials lets consumers, health care professionals, and retailers know that the product contains quality ingredients in the amounts listed on the label.



## Who Is Responsible for the Safety and Labeling of Dietary Supplements?

The dietary supplement manufacturers are responsible for the safety of their products. Before marketing a supplement, the manufacturer is responsible for the quality of the product by ensuring that it is made in accordance with FDA Good Manufacturing Practice regulations for dietary supplements and for the accurate labeling for each product.

Many people assume that the government requires dietary supplement labels to contain warnings about possible side effects or dangers, similar to the warnings that appear on medicine labels. However, current law does not give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the power to regulate dietary supplements as it does with prescription and OTC medicines.

### How Can I Use Supplements Safely?

#### Don'ts

- Don't combine prescription medicines, OTC medicines, vitamins, or dietary supplements without guidance and advice from your pharmacist, doctor, or other qualified health care professional.
- Don't combine supplements without checking with your pharmacist or doctor.
- Don't take any prescription medicines, OTC medicines, or dietary supplements that were prescribed for another person.
- Don't substitute dietary supplements for prescription medicines or OTC medicines.
- Don't use dietary supplements that make exaggerated or unrealistic claims.
- Don't use dietary supplements that include terms like magical, cure-all, quick fix, and scientific breakthrough.
- Don't use dietary supplements that claim they are an alternative to prescription medicines or anabolic steroids.

## Know Your Pharmacist, Know Your Medicine

Choose your pharmacist as carefully as you choose your doctor. Your pharmacist is an important member of your health care team. Using just one pharmacy and getting to know the pharmacist on a first-name basis can benefit your health. That way, your complete medicine record will be kept in a single place and your pharmacist will become familiar with you and your medical history. Your pharmacist can help you select an appropriate dietary supplement, avoid common problems when using your medicines and supplements, and recognize when your condition needs more than self-care and refer you for treatment by a doctor.

#### Do's

- Read the package and label of all dietary supplements carefully. Follow dosing instructions exactly. Pay special attention to warning statements.
- Make sure your doctor, pharmacist, and other health care providers have a list of all the prescription medicines, OTC medicines, vitamins, minerals, and herbal supplements you use.
- Use one pharmacy for purchasing all of your prescription medicines, OTC medicines, and dietary supplements.
- Ask your pharmacist or doctor to help you choose dietary supplements that are right for you, especially if you have any allergies, special dietary requirements, or are taking other medicines. Just because a label says "natural" does not mean it is safe or meets your needs.
- Tell your pharmacist or doctor about any side effects or problems you have after taking a dietary supplement or medicine. Serious reactions can be reported to the FDA by calling 1-800-FDA-1088 or reporting online at [www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch/HowToReport/ucm053074.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch/HowToReport/ucm053074.htm).