

# Dietary Supplements

## What are dietary supplements?

- Dietary supplements are products that people add to their diets. They include vitamins, minerals, herbs, and amino acids.
- They can be pills, 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 “help you lose weight.”

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

- Don't take supplements instead of eating healthy foods.
- Some dietary supplements may help some people get enough essential nutrients to improve their diets and be in their best health.
- If you are having surgery, taking other supplements or medicines, or have health problems dietary supplements may be harmful.

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

- Dietary supplements should not be used instead of prescription medicine.

- If you have health problems and take these products, you may put yourself at risk.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you:
  - Are pregnant or nursing a baby
  - Take other supplements or medicines
  - Are having surgery
  - Have diabetes
  - Have high blood pressure
  - Have any other health problems

## Is it safe to take dietary supplements with other medicines?

- Always talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before you take any dietary supplement.
- These products may have risks. They could be harmful or life threatening if:
  - You are also taking other dietary supplements
  - You are also taking other prescription or over-the-counter medicines
  - You use them instead of medicine that your doctor prescribes



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## How are dietary supplements regulated?

Dietary supplement regulations are similar to food regulations. This means:

- The FDA does not approve dietary supplements before they are sold.
- The FDA can only take action against products that are not safe or products that make false claims after they are for sale.

## Where can I learn more about a certain product?

- Call or write to the company that makes the product.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

## 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 supplements

Ask yourself these questions:

- Who runs the website?
- What is the website trying to do? Is it telling you about the product or just trying to sell it?
- Where does the website get its information? Are there studies that back it up?
- Is the information up to date? Check the date to see when it was posted or updated.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

**FDA Center For Food Safety and Applied Nutrition**  
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/supplmnt.html>

**Office of Dietary Supplements**  
<http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>

**National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine**  
<http://www.nccam.nih.gov>