

Office of Dietary Supplements



Introduction

The mission of the Office of Dietary Supplements at the National Institutes of Health is to strengthen knowledge and understanding of dietary supplements by evaluating scientific information, stimulating and supporting research, disseminating research results, and educating the public to foster an enhanced quality of life and health for the U.S. population.

Dietary supplements are widely used in the United States by people who want to maintain or improve their health or reduce their risk of illness. Americans spend over \$25 billion per year on more than 50,000 products containing vitamins and minerals, herbs and botanicals, and other ingredients such as glucosamine, fish oils, and probiotics.

The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) of 1994 defined dietary supplements as products intended to supplement the diet. DSHEA also established the Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). ODS began operations in November 1995 and its director is Paul M. Coates, PhD.

Scientists are studying dietary supplements to determine their value in maintaining good health. ODS supports this research to assess the benefits and risks of dietary supplements and communicates the results of this research to scientists, health professionals, and consumers.

Examples of ODS Activities

Research Support

The majority of the ODS budget supports research on dietary supplements in collaboration with many NIH institutes and

centers. Since its inception, ODS has provided more than \$125 million in co-funding more than 700 grants. ODS has also funded hundreds of conferences, workshops, symposia, and meetings on dietary supplements that help inform and direct research efforts for ODS and NIH.

Botanical Research Centers

Since 1999, ODS has funded multidisciplinary centers to study the health effects of botanicals (products made from plants) at academic research institutions across the United States. These centers identify and characterize botanical ingredients, assess their biological activity and bioavailability (amount that the body can use); evaluate their effects in cells, animals, and people; help select botanicals to test in clinical trials; and provide a rich environment for training and career development.

Analytical Methods and Reference Materials

More than 50,000 dietary supplements are estimated to be available in the U.S. marketplace, but in many cases, reliable analytical methods are not available to assess the quality of their ingredients. This ODS initiative enhances collaborative efforts to develop and validate analytical methods and develop reference materials for commonly used dietary supplements.

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Evidence-Based Reviews

ODS sponsors systematic reviews of the efficacy and safety of dietary supplements and identification of research needs. Reviewed topics have included ephedra, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, soy, berries and B vitamins, and multivitamin/mineral supplements.

Training and Career Development

ODS provides support for postdoctoral students and scientists at universities across the United States, as well as in government agencies. This program's goal is to expand the number of well-qualified researchers who investigate dietary supplements, with an emphasis on training young investigators, minorities, and women.

Population Studies

This program evaluates dietary supplement use, including the assessment of biological measures of supplement exposure and associated health effects in representative populations. This effort will build the capacity of ODS to analyze population data, such as those from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Initial work has focused on vitamin D through collaborative research projects with several universities and government agencies.

Vitamin D Initiative

ODS leads efforts to advance knowledge of vitamin D's importance to health, and to accurately measure vitamin D levels in foods and vitamin D status in the U.S. population. ODS has funded the development of standard reference materials to assess this nutrient, and has sponsored evidence-based reviews to inform updated recommended dietary allowances and safe levels of intake for vitamin D. ODS also sponsors conferences and workshops on vitamin D and leads a federal working group to identify and meet research needs.

Dietary Supplement Ingredient and Label Databases

With its federal partners, ODS is supporting the analysis of dietary supplements to determine the actual amount of nutrients they contain. ODS is also exploring the feasibility of developing a Web-based database to catalog the labels of all dietary supplements sold in the United States.

International Activities

ODS funds research to improve international public health. Recent studies have addressed the role of probiotics (supplements containing live bacteria for the digestive system) in reducing the risks of diarrheal disease and the effects of iron and zinc malnutrition on the growth and development of infants and children.

Communications

ODS develops and disseminates information about the latest science on dietary supplements. This information is provided through the ODS Web site, fact sheets, an e-newsletter, exhibits, and staff presentations at professional and consumer-focused meetings.

Information Resources on Dietary Supplements

ODS makes accurate and up-to-date scientific information about dietary supplements available to researchers, health care providers, and the public.

Dietary Supplement Fact Sheets

These overviews of dietary supplement ingredients (including vitamin D, black cohosh, and omega-3 fatty acids) are written for varied audiences, including health care providers and consumers.

Computer Access to Research on Dietary Supplements (CARDS)

This searchable database provides information on federally funded research projects pertaining to dietary supplements.

Dietary Supplement Ingredient Database (DSID)

This database provides the amount of nutrients in some dietary supplements based on chemical analysis.

ODS Update Newsletter and Listserv

ODS provides information on its activities, along with news and resources, via an electronic newsletter and a listserv. To subscribe to the listserv and the newsletter, send an email to ListServ@list.nih.gov. In the message body, type: subscribe NIH-ODS-L your name (where your name is your first name followed by last name).



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