

Dietary Supplements: What you need to know

What is a supplement?

- A product taken by mouth that contains a “dietary ingredient”
- Includes: vitamins, herbs, vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals (plants), amino acids, and substances such as enzymes, organ tissues, glandulars, and metabolites; can also be extracts or concentrates
- Available in many forms such as tablets, capsules, softgels, gelpcaps, liquids, or powders, bars

Who regulates supplements?

Dietary supplements are regulated as foods, not drugs, despite the drug-like action of many products. Supplements are not reviewed by the government before they are marketed; however, the FDA must investigate reports of false and misleading product information and also adverse reactions voluntarily reported by manufacturers, or consumers.

What should you consider before taking a supplement?

- Consider your entire diet; supplements are meant to improve your daily diet, not to be the sole source of any given nutrient in your diet.
- Check with your doctor and healthcare team before starting a new supplement.
- Supplements can interact with your over-the-counter and prescribed medications & can have serious effects during surgery.
- You can always contact the manufacturer/distributor for more information about the specific product.

False assumptions to be aware of:

- ***If a product is “natural” it is healthful and safe.*** “Natural” does NOT equal “Safe”. All mushrooms are “natural”, but some have enough toxins to kill.
- ***If a product does not have cautionary information on the label, it is safe.*** The manufacturer is only responsible for the label to be true and not misleading; they are not required to include all warnings & potential adverse effects.
- ***If a product is unsafe and is recalled, it will be immediately and completely removed from the marketplace.*** A dietary supplement product recall is voluntary and does not necessarily remove all harmful products from the marketplace.

Adverse effects from supplements should be reported to MedWatch:

- Call: 1-800-FDA-1088
- Fax: 1-800-FDA-0178
- Online: www.fda.gov/medwatch/how.htm

For helpful information on specific dietary supplements and other important information check out these helpful websites:

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Complementary/Integrative Medicine Education Resources

www.mdanderson.org/cimer

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Herbs at a Glance

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/herbsataglance.htm>

Caring4Cancer

Cancer Knowledge & Support

www.caring4cancer.com

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

About Herbs, Botanicals & Other Products

<http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm>

Also, check out our tips for evaluating online resources for nutritional information at

<http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/cancer-patients/nutrition/resources/online.cfm>