
Herbs, Natural Products and Dietary Supplements

Do I need to tell my health care team what herbal products or dietary supplements I am taking?

Yes! It is vital that you discuss supplement use with your health care team. This is even more important if you:

- are taking any medications
- have diabetes
- have high blood pressure
- have heart disease
- have liver disease
- are having surgery
- are pregnant or nursing a baby

Can supplements and/or herbals interact with the medications I am taking?

Yes! Herbals and other supplements can interact with some prescription medications, making them less safe and/or changing how effective they are. Under some circumstances they can produce adverse effects, some of which can be deadly.

Are supplements safe with surgery?

It is important to fully inform your doctor about the vitamins, minerals, herbals, or any other supplements you take, especially before elective surgery. You may be asked to stop taking these products at least 2-3 weeks ahead of time to avoid any potentially dangerous interactions.

Who makes sure supplements are safe?

Manufacturers are responsible for making sure their products are safe before they go to market. Dietary supplement products are not reviewed by the government before they are sold. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the job of acting against any unsafe dietary supplement product that reaches the market, but this may not happen until many people have already reported harm from the product.

What do I do if a supplement I am taking makes me sick?

- Tell your health care team.
- Call the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088 to report it.

What do I need to know?

- Always remember to tell your healthcare team when you start or stop taking an herbal, natural product, or dietary supplement.
- The term “natural” does not mean that the product is safe.
- Follow the dosing guidelines. More is not better.
- Choose single herb products. Avoid mixtures.
- Choose only products marked with third-party certification seals to avoid banned ingredients or contamination. This includes organizations such as Consumer Lab, Banned Substances Control Group (BSCG), Informed Sport/Informed Choice, NSF, and USP. Examples of these seals are shown below.



Where can I find more information about herbs and other dietary supplements?

National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements
Bethesda, MD 20892 <https://ods.od.nih.gov/>

U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
5100 Paint Branch Parkway
College Park, MD 20740
Call 1-800-FDA-1088
www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/default.htm

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine
P.O. Box 7923
Gaithersburg, MD 20898
1-888-644-6226
www.nccam.nih.gov/