



University of California
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TIPS FOR THE SAVVY SUPPLEMENT USER, PART I

FDA, as well as health professionals and their organizations, receive many questions each year from consumers seeking health-related information, especially about dietary supplements. The choice to use a dietary supplement can be a wise decision that provides health benefits. However, under certain circumstances, these products may be unnecessary for good health or they may even create unexpected risk.

Given the great quantity and conflicting nature of information now available about supplements, you may need help to sort the reliable information from the questionable. Below are tips and resources that will help you be a savvy dietary supplement user. The principles underlying these tips are similar to those principles a savvy consumer would use for any product.

1. You need to think about your total diet. Dietary supplements are intended to supplement the diets of some people, but not to replace the balance of the variety of foods important to a healthy diet. While you need enough nutrients, too much of some nutrients can cause problems.
2. You should check with your doctor or healthcare provider before using a supplement. This is a good idea, especially for certain population groups. Dietary supplements may not be risk-free under certain circumstances. If you are pregnant, nursing a baby, or have a chronic medical condition, such as diabetes, hypertension, or heart disease, be sure to consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking any supplement. While vitamin and mineral supplements are widely used and generally considered

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safe for children, you may wish to check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving these or other supplements to you child.

3. Talking to your doctor about supplements is very important if you are taking prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Taking a combination of supplements or using these products together with medications (whether prescription or over-the-counter) could under certain circumstances produce adverse effects, some of which could be life threatening. Be alert to advisories about these products, whether taken alone or in combination. For example: Coumadin (a prescription medicine), ginko biloba (an herbal supplement), aspirin (an OTC drug) and vitamin E (a vitamin supplement) cab each thin the blood, and taking any of these products together can increase the potential for internal bleeding.
4. Talking to your doctor about supplements is very important if you are undergoing surgery. It is important to fully inform you doctor about the vitamins, minerals, herbals, or any other supplements you are taking, especially before elective surgery. You may be asked to stop taking these products at least 2-3 weeks ahead of the procedure to avoid potentially dangerous supplement/drug interactions—such as changes in heart rate, blood pressure and increased bleeding – that could adversely effect the outcome of your surgery.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety & Applied Nutrition, Dietary Supplements, January, 2002.
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-savvy.html>

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