



University of California  
Cooperative Extension  
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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## TIPS FOR THE SAVVY SUPPLEMENT USER, PART II

Under the law, manufacturers of dietary supplements are responsible for making sure their products are safe before they go to market. They are also responsible for determining that the claims on their labels are accurate and truthful. The government does not review dietary supplement products before they are marketed, but FDA has the responsibility to take action against any unsafe dietary supplement product that reaches the market. If FDA can prove that claims on marketed dietary supplement products are false and misleading, the agency may take action also against products with such claims.

Harmful effects from the use of dietary supplements should be reported to MedWatch. You, your health care provider, or anyone may report a serious adverse event or illness directly to FDA if you believe it is related to the use of any dietary supplement product, by calling FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088, by fax at 1-800-FDA-0178 or on-line at <http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/how.htm>. FDA would like to know whenever you think a product caused you a serious problem, even if you are not sure that the product was the cause, and even if you do not visit a doctor or clinic. In addition to communicating with FDA on-line or by phone, you may use the MedWatch form available from the FDA Web site.

The Internet is a rich source of health information; it is also an easy vehicle for spreading myths, hoaxes and rumors about alleged news, studies, products or findings. To avoid falling prey to such hoaxes, be skeptical and watch out for overly emphatic language with UPPERCASE LETTERS and lots of exclamation points!!!! Beware of such phrases such as: "This is not a hoax" or "Send this to everyone you know."

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Whether it is an add in print or a message on the Internet here are some tips to help you to evaluate any health information you might receive:

- ▶ Who is the information from? Is it the government, a university, or a reputable medical or health-related association (e.g. American Medical Association)? Is the information written or reviewed by qualified health professionals, experts in the field, academia, government or the medical community?
- ▶ What is the purpose of the information? Is the information intended to educate the public or just to sell a product? Be aware of practitioners or organizations whose main interest is in marketing product, either directly or through Internet sites with which they are linked. Most nonprofit and government sites contain no advertising; and access to the site and materials offered are usually free.
- ▶ Ask yourself: Does it sound too good to be true? Do the claims for the product seem exaggerated or unrealistic? Are there simplistic conclusions being drawn from a complex study. Learn to distinguish between hype from evidence-based science.
- ▶ Think twice about chasing the latest headline. Sound health advice is generally based on a body of research, not a single study. Be wary of results claiming a “quick fix” that depart from previous research and scientific beliefs. Furthermore, news stories about the latest scientific study, especially those on TV or radio, are often too brief to include important details that may apply to you or allow you to make an informed decision.

**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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