

Dietary Supplements

DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS AND HEALTH

There are many dietary supplements. Examples are vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, fish oils, garlic, and flax seed. Companies promote them as being good for health. But this doesn't mean they are healthy for everyone. It depends on the person, the supplement, and the dose.

Vitamins and Minerals

Everyone needs vitamins and minerals. Foods are the best source. However, many older adults may not get enough from foods. Their diets may be low in calcium, vitamin B12, vitamin D, or other nutrients. A vitamin-mineral supplement can help meet nutrient needs.

Before taking vitamin or mineral supplements, be aware that:

- Large doses of some nutrients may have harmful effects.
- Some supplements may react with medicines.
- You should ask your doctor whether supplements are needed, and what dose is best.

Herbal Supplements

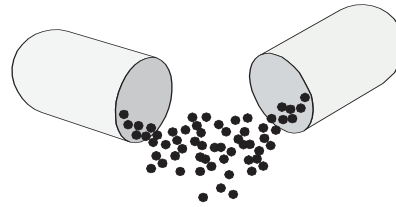
Many people have heard health claims about herbal supplements. Examples are ginseng, St. John's wort, and black cohosh.

Medical experts are studying whether herbs are safe and effective. Here is what they have learned so far:

- Some may have positive effects.
- Others may react with medicines or nutrients.
- Some have harmful contaminants.
- The amount listed on the label may differ from what is in the actual dose.

Other Dietary Supplements

Experts are also studying other dietary supplements to learn whether they are effective and safe. These include amino acids, fish oils, garlic, and flax seed.



ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

- Supplements should not replace a healthful diet or medical advice.
- Large doses aren't always better than smaller doses. They can even be harmful.
- Some supplements may react with medicines, or with other supplements. This may have harmful effects.
- Until experts learn more about certain supplements, it may be too soon to recommend them.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

An FDA Guide to Dietary Supplements

Website: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fdsupp.html

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

Tips for Older Dietary Supplement Users

Website: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-savv2.html