



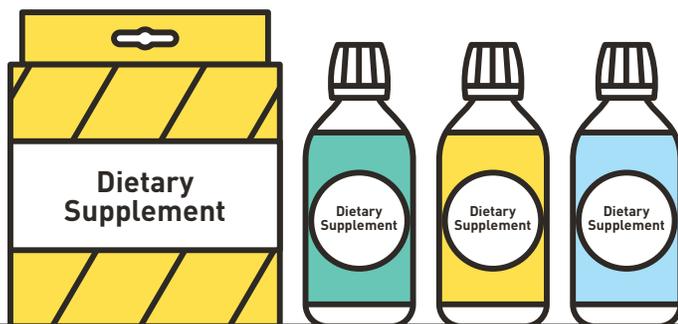
Talking to Healthcare Professionals About Dietary Supplements

Dietary supplements can help you improve or maintain your overall health, and some can help you meet your daily requirements of essential nutrients. While supplements can be beneficial to your health, they can also involve health risks—especially if you take them with or instead of medications. **Before deciding to take a supplement, do your research and always talk to your healthcare professional.**

Be an Informed Consumer

When considering whether to take a dietary supplement, it's important to know the facts.

- **Be cautious of products marketed as dietary supplements that claim to diagnose, cure, mitigate, treat, or prevent diseases.** For example, a product that bears a claim such as “treats heart disease” or “cures cancer” is a drug and is subject to all requirements for drugs, even if it is marketed as a dietary supplement.
- **Be mindful of product claims,** such as “works better than [a prescription drug],” “totally safe,” or has “no side effects.” If a claim sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- **Search for information on credible websites** (such as www.fda.gov, www.nih.gov, and www.usda.gov) and look for research studies published in peer reviewed journals.



Speak with Your Healthcare Team

To help you figure out what information is reliable, the best resource is your healthcare team. This team might include your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or registered dietitian. They have access to the most current medical research and are the most familiar with your health history. They can help you determine if a dietary supplement is right for you.

What to Ask Your Healthcare Professional

Come prepared to your medical appointments with your research and questions about dietary supplements. For example:

- Is taking a dietary supplement important for my overall health?
- Am I taking the right product?
- Am I taking the right amount?
- Is there an amount or "upper limit" I should not go above?
- How long should I take the supplement?
- Are there any known side effects?
- Are there any foods, medicines (prescription or over-the-counter), or other dietary supplements I should avoid while taking this product?
- If I am scheduled for surgery or lab work, are there any supplements I should avoid?

Symptoms to Watch Out For

Sometimes dietary supplements can cause **side effects or bad reactions, also known as adverse events**, that can range from less serious to life-threatening. Some examples include itching, loss of appetite, severe or persistent abdominal pain, blood in the urine, shortness of breath, fainting, or cognitive changes. If you experience these or any other adverse events, **immediately stop taking the supplement and seek medical care or advice.**

Did You Know?

Dietary supplements can interact with some medicines (prescription and over-the-counter) and may cause problems. Some examples include:

- St. John's wort can reduce the effectiveness of some medications prescribed for heart disease, cancer, HIV, depression, seizures, and birth control.
- Antioxidant supplements, such as vitamins C and E, might reduce the effectiveness of some types of cancer chemotherapy.
- Vitamin K can reduce the ability of the blood thinner warfarin (Coumadin) to prevent blood from clotting.
- Warfarin (Coumadin), ginkgo biloba, aspirin, and high-dose vitamin E can each thin the blood. Taking any of these products together can increase the potential for internal bleeding or stroke.



Your Dietary Supplement and Medication Record

It is helpful to keep a **record** of what supplements and medications you take. **Print and share** this record with your healthcare professionals at all your visits. A sample chart can be found below or at www.ods.od.nih.gov/pubs/DietarySupplementandMedicineRecord.pdf.

Name _____ Age _____ Date _____

Dietary Supplements

Complete the chart below for any dietary supplement(s) you take.

Product	How Often	How Much (dosage)	Reason for Taking
Example: Calcium	Once a day	500 mg	Support healthy bones
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Over-the-Counter and Prescription Medications

Complete the chart below for any over-the-counter medication(s) (e.g., pain reliever, cold medicine, or stool softener) or prescription medication(s) you take.

1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Adverse Events (Reactions, Side Effects, or Other Problems) I've Had with Any Dietary Supplement or Medication

