

Supplements and Complementary Therapies

You've probably heard that taking supplements or herbs is a "natural" way to treat an illness, or to use daily to "support good health" or to "boost the immune system." These are popular phrases used by manufacturers to convince you to buy their products. However, without more information on the proven risks and benefits of supplements and herbs, they can be used inappropriately and this can result in negative side effects. It is difficult to get good data on herbal medicines and supplements. Many studies do not meet rigorous scientific standards, may be biased by commercial interests and rely on anecdotal information to support scientific claims. Most likely, information about interactions with other medications is limited and long term use is not recommended for some products. Herbs can have a drug like action in the body, and therefore must be taken with careful consideration. Always inform your physician and other health professionals involved in your care about any supplements or herbs you are taking.

Below are websites to assist you in your analysis of the different products on the market. Some of the websites have a subscription cost, which may be well worth considering because they may help you evaluate a company's product for ingredients and labeling issues.

American Dietetic Association

With nearly 65,000 members, the American Dietetic Association is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being.

http://www.eatright.org/Public/GovernmentAffairs/92_8080.cfm

Project Inform

Project Inform is a national nonprofit, community based organization working to end the AIDS epidemic.

<http://www.projectinform.org/fs/herbs.html>

Office of Dietary Supplements

This website has fact sheets for vitamins, minerals, botanicals, and many other supplements, including steroids.

http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov/Health_Information/Information_About_Individual_Dietary_Supplements.aspx

US FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition

Information about Dietary Supplements, Consumer Education and General Information and Warning Information

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-info.html>

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-warn.html>

National Library of Science, National Institutes of Health

HIV/AIDS Alternative and Complementary Therapy

<http://www.sis.nlm.nih.gov/HIV/HIVAlternative.html>

Texas AIDS Health Fraud Information Network

Information on supplements that have not received FDA approval and should be used with extreme caution or avoided altogether.

<http://healthfraud.org/tx/resources/factsheets/default.htm>

Supplements and Complementary Therapies *continued*

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Therapy

Get the Facts: What is Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

Some information in Spanish.

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/whatiscam/>

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/decisions/index.htm>

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/alerts/index.htm>

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements.htm>

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/bytreatment.htm>

The Body

Herbal Supplements: Consider Safety, Too

<http://www.thebody.com/nccam/safety.html>

<http://www.thebody.com/treat/herbal.html>

Information on supplement safety and links to additional resources such as Office of Dietary Supplements, Cochrane Library, PubMed and more.

Pharmacist's Letter/Natural Medicines Database (Yearly subscription cost)

www.naturaldatabase.com

The following are organizations providing independent certification for dietary supplement products. The components usually included for certification are:

- **Identity:** Verification that the contents of the supplement actually match what is printed on the label
- **Identity and quality:** Assurance that there are no ingredients present in the supplement that are not openly disclosed on the label
- **Purity:** Assurance that there are no unacceptable levels of contaminants present in the supplement
- **Availability:** Does the product break apart so it can be used by the body

Consumer's Lab

Some information free with more extensive information available with paid subscription of \$24 a year.

www.consumerlab.com

National Science Foundation International

www.nsf.org

United States Pharmacopeia

www.usp.org