



The Scoop On Supplements

Many people take dietary supplements in an effort to be well and stay healthy. With so many dietary supplements available and so many claims made about their health benefits, how can a consumer decide what's safe and effective? As a consumer . . . remember that Federal regulations for dietary supplements are very different from those for prescription and over-the-counter drugs. For example, a dietary supplement manufacturer does not have to prove a product's safety and effectiveness before it is marketed.

Dietary supplements were defined in a law passed by Congress in 1994 called the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA). According to DSHEA, a dietary supplement is a product that:

- Is intended to supplement the diet
- Contains one or more dietary ingredients (including vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals, amino acids, and certain other substances).
- Is intended to be taken by mouth, in forms such as tablet, capsule, powder, softgel, gelcap, or liquid.
- Is labeled as being a dietary supplement.

If you're thinking about taking a dietary supplement:

1. Choose supplements with established brand names or chain store generics. Look for the letters USP or NSF on the packaging or label.
2. Get info on dietary supplements from a credible source such as the National Consumer, NIH or the FDA.
3. Carefully read label warnings before you buy.
4. Don't get taken in by hype on the internet. If there's a problem with a product a dot.com may be out of business when you try to reach them.
5. Never use a supplement in place of a prescribed medicine.



For information on specific supplements, please refer to:

<http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>

