



# DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

*Be an Informed Consumer*



The Hawai'i State Department of Health urges persons who consume dietary supplements to use caution and consult their physician or health care provider.

## Q: What are dietary supplements?

**A:** "Dietary supplements" can refer to many different tablets, powders, capsules, soft gels, and chewables. Familiar ones, such as one-a-day multi-vitamins, may help you get enough essential nutrients.

However, many supplements also contain active ingredients that can strongly affect your body. Taking a dietary supplement can involve serious health risks.

*Consumers should be aware of possibly harmful products on the market and should consult their doctor or health care provider before using them.*

## Q: Are there risks in taking dietary supplements?

**A:** Yes. Many dietary supplements contain active ingredients that can affect your body's functions. They may be unsafe in some situations or complicate your health. Certain actions could be harmful or even life-threatening, such as:

- Taking supplements with prescription or over-the-counter medication
- Substituting supplements for prescription medicines
- Taking too much vitamin A, vitamin D, iron, or certain other supplements
- Taking supplements before, during, or after surgery.

*In any of these situations, always check with your doctor or health care provider first.*

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## Q: Are dietary supplements guaranteed to be safe?

**A:** No. A dietary supplement does NOT need government approval for safety and effectiveness before it can be marketed and sold.

Only when a product contains a NEW ingredient (never before used in dietary supplements) will the U.S. Food and Drug Administration review it (not approve it) for safety before it is sold.

## Q: What is the process for bringing supplements to market?

**A:** Manufacturers and distributors of dietary supplements are responsible for making sure their products are safe before they go to market.

Manufacturers must meet minimum standards of quality, ensure that their product doesn't contain contaminants, and label the package correctly.

Manufacturers must report all serious adverse events (unwanted or unexpected negative reactions) or illnesses to the FDA.

*If a supplement is found to be unsafe or tainted or the label's claims are false and misleading, the FDA can take the product off the market.*

## Q: How can I protect myself?

**A:** Be an informed consumer. Some product claims may be too good to be true. Watch out for bold promises, such as a "quick cure-all." Be aware that "natural" doesn't always mean "safe." Don't assume that, even if a product won't help you, at least it won't hurt you.

- Take a few minutes to learn about the supplement you're taking: the ingredients, its safety and effectiveness, and any reports of adverse effects or problems among consumers. Call the manufacturer or distributor, or visit their website.
- Ask your doctor or health care provider for advice about how to tell false claims from reliable information.

## Q: Where can I get more information?

**A:** Visit the U.S. Food & Drug Administration for reliable facts on dietary supplements:

- Dietary Supplements: What You Need to Know  
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/UsingDietarySupplements/ucm109760.htm>
- Health Fraud Scams  
<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ProtectYourself/HealthFraud/default.htm>
- Tainted and Potentially Hazardous Dietary Supplements  
[http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/sda/sdNavigation.cfm?sd=tainted\\_supplements\\_cder](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/sda/sdNavigation.cfm?sd=tainted_supplements_cder)