

# Dietary Supplements



**U.S. FOOD & DRUG  
ADMINISTRATION**

Dietary supplements are products that people add to their diets. They include vitamins, minerals, herbs, and amino acids. They can be pills, liquids, powders, or energy bars.

Although dietary supplements can help support good health, they may also cause side effects and health problems. It is important to think about the health benefits and risks before taking any product.

Anyone can have problems with dietary supplements. Some women need to take special steps to stay safe.

## Pregnant Women

- Talk to your healthcare provider about what kind of prenatal vitamins you should take.
- Ask how much folic acid you should take before you get pregnant and during the first part of your pregnancy. Folic acid helps prevent birth defects in the baby's brain and spine.

## Women with Children

- Talk to your healthcare provider before you give supplements like vitamins to a child.
- Keep all supplements out of your child's reach and sight.

## Women with Health Problems

- Supplements are not intended to treat, diagnose, prevent, or cure diseases.
- Do not take supplements instead of your prescription medicines.
- Tell your healthcare provider about any herbs, vitamins, or other products you take. Some can affect how your prescriptions work.
- Some dietary supplements can be harmful if you take them before you have surgery.

## Questions to Ask About Your Supplements

Talk to your healthcare provider before you use a dietary supplement. Ask:

- How much should I take? Too much of some supplements can make you sick.
- Will they affect the prescription or over-the-counter medicines I take?
- When should I take them? For how long?

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## How FDA Helps You

FDA takes action against unsafe products after they are for sale.

However, FDA does not review or approve the safety of dietary supplements before they are sold. FDA reviews and takes action against false claims in product labels and other product information.

- Contact FDA if you have a serious problem after taking a dietary supplement.  
**1-800-FDA-1088 or [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch)**
- Visit the FDA website to get other tips and safety alerts.  
**[www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements](http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements)**

## Be a Smart Shopper

Beware of scams and false claims. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

## Get the Facts Before You Buy

- Check the source of the information on the product website or TV ad.
- Call or write the company that makes the product for more information.
- Check the National Institutes of Health (NIH) website to learn more about research on dietary supplements. **<http://ods.od.nih.gov>**
- Report false advertising to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). **[www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or 1-877-382-4357**

This fact sheet was developed by the FDA Office of Women's Health.  
To get other women's health resources, go to

**[www.fda.gov/womens](http://www.fda.gov/womens)**

