Dietary Supplements

What are dietary supplements?
• Dietary supplements are products that people add to their diets. They include vitamins, minerals, herbs, and amino acids.
• They can be pills, liquids, or powders.
• By law, companies that make these products cannot claim they prevent, treat, or cure disease. For example, a product cannot claim that it can “cure cancer” or “help you lose weight.”

Can dietary supplements be taken instead of eating certain foods?
No.
• Don’t take supplements instead of eating healthy foods.
• Some dietary supplements may help some people get enough essential nutrients to improve their diets and be in their best health.
• If you are having surgery, taking other supplements or medicines, or have health problems dietary supplements may be harmful.

Should I check with my doctor before using a supplement? Yes.
• Dietary supplements should not be used instead of prescription medicine.

• If you have health problems and take these products, you may put yourself at risk.
• Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you:
  o Are pregnant or nursing a baby
  o Take other supplements or medicines
  o Are having surgery
  o Have diabetes
  o Have high blood pressure
  o Have any other health problems

Is it safe to take dietary supplements with other medicines?
• Always talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before you take any dietary supplement.
• These products may have risks. They could be harmful or life threatening if:
  o You are also taking other dietary supplements
  o You are also taking other prescription or over-the-counter medicines
  o You use them instead of medicine that your doctor prescribes
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How are dietary supplements regulated?
Dietary supplement regulations are similar to food regulations. This means:
• The FDA does not approve dietary supplements before they are sold.
• The FDA can only take action against products that are not safe or products that make false claims after they are for sale.

Where can I learn more about a certain product?
• Call or write to the company that makes the product.
• Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

How do I report a problem or illness caused by one of these products?
• Call 1-800-FDA-1088
• Go to the MedWatch website at: http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/report/consumer/consumer.htm

Tips on searching the web for information on supplements
Ask yourself these questions:
• Who runs the website?
• What is the website trying to do? Is it telling you about the product or just trying to sell it?
• Where does the website get its information? Are there studies that back it up?
• Is the information up to date? Check the date to see when it was posted or updated.

To Learn More:
FDA Center For Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/supplmnt.html
Office of Dietary Supplements
National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine
http://www.nccam.nih.gov

FDA Office of Women's Health http://www.fda.gov/womens

TAKE TIME TO CARE... For yourself, for those who need you.