



What do you need to know... before taking an herb or supplement?



- ❖ In general, herbs and supplements are safe, but this does not mean that they don't cause problems. As more research is done on herbs and supplements, more becomes known about their safety. Problems can arise when people take too much of them, take them with prescription medicines, or take them without getting the medical care and advice they need. If the supplements were not made right, they may not work, or cause serious side effects.
- ❖ Any health condition you have, even those you don't know you have, may make taking an herb or supplement dangerous.
- ❖ Herbs and supplements may make your prescription medicines not work for you, or may cause serious side effects when taken with your prescription medicines.

- ❖ Know the education of persons who recommend that you use an herb or supplement. Before spending your money on a recommended product, know that you can trust the person's knowledge of the proper use of herbs and supplements.
- ❖ Information about herbs and supplements is always changing as more people study their use, which may change how an herb or supplement is used. If you take an herb or supplement, keep up on the news about its use. See the back page for some credible websites for herb and supplement information.
- ❖ If you take an herb or supplement and have any symptoms that are not normal for you, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse right away and tell them what you are taking.
- ❖ Don't be afraid to talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about herbs and supplements that you use or are thinking about using. Health care professionals are concerned about your safety, and they support your involvement in decisions relating to your care.
- ❖ Often herbs and supplements do not contain what their label says, even if it says the product is "standardized". Standardization is not a guarantee that the product is the same in the bottle you buy today as that in the bottle you buy next month, even from the same company. Contamination is still a problem for some products.



- ❖ One way to know that the product has been tested for what it says it contains on the label and has been tested for contaminants is to look for products that have undergone testing by one of these groups.

Important: These certifications do NOT assure that the product:

- Is effective for any purpose
- Is safe



- United States Pharmacopeia (USP)

The USP mark assures that the product:

- Contains the declared ingredients on the product label
- Contains the amount or strength of ingredients declared on the product label
- Meets requirements for limits on potential contaminants
- Has been manufactured properly by complying with USP and proposed FDA standards for "good manufacturing practices" (GMPs)

For a full list of products that have been certified by USP, see http://www.uspverified.org/participants/participants_cons.html

- NSF International, The Public Health and Safety Company™



The NSF mark assures that the product:

- Contains the declared ingredients on the product label
- Is free of contaminants and undeclared ingredients
- Has been manufactured properly by complying with USP and proposed FDA standards for "good manufacturing practices" (GMPs)

For a full list of products that have been certified by NSF, see <http://www.nsf.org/Certified/Dietary>



- National Nutritional Foods Association (NNFA)

The NNFA mark assures that the manufacturer:

- Complies with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs). GMPs include standards for quality control/assurance, cleanliness, checking identity and potency of ingredients, and testing of final products for potency, purity and bioavailability.

For a full list of products that have been certified by NNFA, see http://www.nnfa.org/services/science/GMP_Cos.htm



- ConsumerLab.com

The ConsumerLab.com mark assures that the product:

- Meets recognized standards of quality and the label accurately reflects what is in the product
- Is free of contaminants
- The product breaks down properly so that it can be used by the body (bioavailability)
- Each unit of the product has the same identity, potency and purity

Credible websites for natural medicine information:

<http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11571.cfm>

http://www.pardeehospital.org/pharm_pharmacy.htm

<http://www.healthwell.com>

<http://www.consumerlab.com>

<http://www.supplementquality.com/>

Note: This brochure was created in April 2004. Information is subject to change as new information becomes available.

Authors and Reviewers: Lisa Lash, PharmD, RPh; Heather Cabiness, PharmD Candidate; Christine Grenier, PharmD, RPh, Scott Olson, ND