

# Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

July 2007 Newsletter

## Play It Safe with Supplements

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Have you been to the grocery or drug store lately and stopped to look at all the vitamins and other dietary supplements available? With so many to choose from, how do you know which ones you need or don't need? Are they worth buying?

When considering dietary supplement use, it is first important to understand what they are. Supplements include vitamins and minerals, herbs, botanicals, and other substances. As the name implies, they are intended to supplement (not



replace) a diet filled with a variety of nutritious foods. Supplements are widely available at many local stores, as well as on the internet. They are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), however, the FDA does not analyze supplements for content, safety, or effectiveness before they are marketed.

Supplements can provide adequate amounts of certain nutrients if the foods you eat do not meet all of your needs.

For many older adults, certain dietary supplements may be needed, as it can be hard to get adequate amounts of specific nutrients from a regular diet. Some dietary supplements may help reduce risk of certain diseases as well. Keep in mind, however, that dietary supplements are not meant to treat, prevent, or cure diseases.

Vitamin D, calcium, and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> are a few examples of nutrients that older adults may not get enough of from their diet. Many multivitamin/mineral supplements contain these nutrients and many others, too. When deciding whether or not to take a dietary supplement, consider these safety tips from the National Institute of Health's Office of Dietary Supplements and the Food and Drug Administration:

**Talk with your doctor** before taking a dietary supplement to be sure it is right for you.

**Do not let a supplement replace prescribed medications or healthy foods.** Continue to follow the instructions of your health care

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provider and take medications as recommended.

Be sure to **let your health professional know what dietary supplements you are taking**, especially before surgery, as some can have quite potent effects in the body that could compromise your safety.

Supplement manufacturers are not required to prove effectiveness of their products. **Be wary of claims for supplements that sound too good to be true.** Supplements can have side effects, so use caution.

**Look for “seals of approval”** on supplements, such as the USP seal, indicating that a supplement was properly manufactured, contains ingredients indicated on the label, and does not contain harmful levels of contaminants.

**Be aware that certain combinations of supplements and medications can produce adverse effects**, so look for advisories about these products, and talk to your doctor before taking a supplement.



Be mindful of dosage. **More does not mean better**, and high doses of

supplements can produce harmful effects.

**Do not assume that the term “natural” on a supplement label equals safe.** It may still interact with drugs or produce adverse effects for some people.

Remember to eat a varied and healthful diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk products, and lean protein sources, even if you take dietary supplements. While supplements may contribute single vitamins, minerals, and other substances, they are no substitute for the thousands of compounds in whole foods that may act together to help protect us from chronic diseases.



**For more information, see:**

National Institutes of Health  
Office of Dietary Supplements at:  
[http://ods.od.nih.gov/Health\\_Information/Health\\_Information.aspx](http://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/Health_Information.aspx)

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)  
Center for Food Safety and Applied  
Nutrition at:  
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-info.html>

