



American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (aapp.org)

# Dietary and Herbal Supplements In Mental Health

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- Dietary and herbal supplements are not as regulated as prescription medications.
- Although possibly helpful, dietary and herbal supplements may cause bad side effects if used with other medications.
- Safe does not always mean effective.
- **Always** talk with your provider or pharmacist before starting any dietary or herbal supplements.

## What are dietary and herbal supplements?

Dietary supplements are products that are used to supplement the diet and may help manage diseases or maintain health. Herbal supplements are a type of dietary supplement that contains one or more herbs.<sup>1</sup> Supplements can come in many forms, including tablets, capsules, powders, chewables, and liquids.

## Are dietary and herbal supplements reviewed by the government?

Unlike prescription medications, supplements do NOT need to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before they are sold.<sup>2</sup> The FDA can prevent a product from being sold if they later find that it is unsafe or if the label's claims about their benefits are false.<sup>1</sup>

"Safe" does not always mean "effective". Be careful of labels that say the supplement can heal something. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about how well a supplement may work for you.

## How can I tell if a dietary or herbal supplement would be helpful for me?

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for up-to-date information on the supplement or where to find it. If you have more questions about a specific product, contact the manufacturer or distributor. You can find their contact information on the bottle.

## Are there risks of using dietary/herbal supplements?

Dietary and herbal supplements can have risks you may not expect when using them, especially when taken with other medications. It is very important to let your health care provider know if you are taking or considering a natural supplement. These supplements may cause side effects when used alone, in combination with other medications, or if you have other medical conditions, such as liver or kidney damage.

Always let your health care provider know if you are taking or thinking about starting a dietary/herbal supplement, especially if:

- You are taking other prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medications
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding
- You are younger than 18 years old or older than 65 years old
- You are going to have surgery
- You have a medical condition, such as heart, liver, or kidney disease

## Safety tips for using dietary/herbal supplements

- Always tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are using a dietary/herbal supplement.
- Follow directions on the labels. Do not take more than recommended. Taking higher doses may cause more side effects.
- Watch out for any alerts from the FDA. Sometimes, if a bad batch of a supplement has been found, the FDA will “recall,” or take back, the product. Check the news and the FDA website to see if there have been any recent product recalls. The FDA may also provide updates on any supplements reported to cause side effects.
- When choosing a supplement, look for a United States Pharmacopeia (USP) Verified Mark. This is a company that is not connected with the manufacturer of the product that tests for purity. This mark means:
  - The ingredients are listed in the correct amounts.
  - The supplement was manufactured under good conditions.
  - It does not guarantee the product’s effectiveness or complete safety for everyone.

## Common supplements used in mental health

Dietary/Herbal Supplement	Use	Usual Dosing	Side Effects	Major Drug Interactions
St John’s Wort <sup>3</sup>	Depression	500 – 1,800 mg/day divided in three doses <sup>3</sup>	Dry mouth, dizziness, difficulty urinating or having bowel movements, light sensitivity <sup>4</sup>	Warfarin, oral birth control, antidepressants, digoxin, verapamil, zolpidem, olanzapine <sup>5-7</sup>
Melatonin <sup>8</sup>	Insomnia, jet lag, shift work sleep disorder	0.5 – 10 mg before bedtime	Daytime sleepiness, headache, confusion, nausea <sup>10,11</sup>	Alcohol, sedatives
Omega-3 Fatty Acids <sup>3</sup>	Depression	1 – 5 grams/day divided in three doses <sup>3</sup>	Stomach upset, nausea, diarrhea, increased bleeding risk (uncommon) <sup>3,12</sup>	Antiplatelets, anticoagulants

## Dangerous Supplements to Avoid

Supplement	Risk
Kava <sup>13</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of liver damage with use &gt;8 weeks<sup>14</sup></li> <li>• Rash, skin discoloration/scaling<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>
Ginkgo biloba <sup>16</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May increase risk of stroke and bleeding<sup>16,17</sup></li> </ul>
Tryptophan <sup>18</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of serotonin syndrome</li> </ul>



Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

[aapp.org/515642](http://aapp.org/515642)

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