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

What are dietary and herbal supplements?

Dietary supplements are products that are used to supplement the diet which may be useful in taking care of a disease or staying healthy. Herbal supplements are a type of dietary supplement that contains one or more herbs.¹ 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 have to be checked by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before they are sold.² The FDA can prevent a product from being sold if they later find that it is unsafe or if what the labels say about their benefits are false.¹

“Safe” does not always mean “it works”. 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. They will be able to give you up-to-date information on the supplement or will show you to where to find the information. If you have more questions about a specific product, contact the manufacturer or distributor. You can find information on how to contact the manufacturer or distributor on the label 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 if taking any other medications. It is very important to let your healthcare provider know if you are taking a natural supplement or are thinking about starting one. These supplements may cause side effects when used alone or if used in combination with other medications or if you have other medical conditions, such as liver or kidney damage.

You should always let your healthcare provider know if you are taking a dietary/herbal supplement or are thinking about starting one, 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 and does tests for purity. This mark means:
 - The ingredients are listed in the right amounts.
 - The supplement was made in good manufacturing conditions.
 - It does NOT mean that the product is effective or completely safe for everyone.

Common supplements used in mental health

Dietary/Herbal Supplement	Use	Usual Dosing	Side Effects	Major Drug Interactions
St John’s Wort ³	Depression	500 – 1,800 mg/day divided in three doses ³	Dry mouth, dizziness, difficulty urinating or having bowel movements, light sensitive ⁴	Warfarin, oral birth control, antidepressants, digoxin, verapamil, zolpidem, olanzapine ⁵⁻⁷
Melatonin ⁸	Sleep	0.5 – 10 mg/day ⁹	Daytime sleepiness, confusion, low sex drive ^{10,11}	None major
Omega-3 Fatty Acids ³	Depression	1 – 9 grams/day divided in three doses ³	Stomach upset, nausea, diarrhea, mania, increased bleed risk (uncommon) ^{3,12}	None major

Dangerous Supplements to Avoid

Supplement	Risk
Kava ¹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of liver damage with use >8 weeks¹⁴ • Rash, skin discoloration/scaling¹⁵
Gingko biloba ¹⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May increase risk of stroke and bleeding^{16,17}
Tryptophan ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of increasing lithium to dangerous levels¹⁸



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

aapp.org/515642

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