



Tips for Taking Natural Products

THINGS TO DO:

- Select high quality products from trusted manufacturers
- Look for products with labels including a seal of approval from an independent source, if available
- Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any natural products you are taking
- Know the side effects of your natural products
- Scrutinize health claims made by natural product manufacturers

THINGS NOT TO DO:

- Do not take unnecessary risks – especially if you are pregnant, nursing, or intend to give the product to a child
- Do not assume that more is better – doubling the dose does not mean double the benefit
- Do not ignore adverse reactions to a natural product – stop taking it and talk to your doctor or pharmacist immediately
- Do not have unrealistic expectations about the benefit or harm that can result from using natural products

Confused About Natural Products?

From vitamins to minerals, herbal and animal products, the selection of natural products available today can seem overwhelming. We hope this article clears up some of the confusion about natural products.

Effectiveness

Supplements and natural products have been used traditionally to treat many conditions, yet they often have limited effectiveness. The effectiveness of some natural products have been studied thoroughly, whereas others have not. It is important to investigate the claims for products you wish to take. There are limitless websites devoted to natural products, but be careful when relying on the internet for unbiased information. Some websites may contain misinformation, some may be outdated, and others may be more interested in your pocketbook than your health.

Safety & Labeling

Unlike prescription medications, natural products do not go through Food and Drug

Administration (FDA) testing to ensure they are safe and effective. Nevertheless, the FDA can ban a product if it poses an unreasonable risk of harm to the consumer. Like prescription medications, natural products have side effects, some of which may be potentially harmful or life-threatening.

Because natural products do not need FDA approval, companies are not allowed to make claims for cures on their labels. However, they can state the product will promote or support the normal function of a body system or be a natural defense against something harmful. There is often a lack of scientific evidence to support these statements and consumers should weigh the evidence before purchasing. Proper labeling should include the lot or batch number and date of production, as well as contact information for the manufacturing company. Consumers can also look for products with various quality seals or seals of approval showing that the product has been tested by an independent lab.

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Independent Certifications for Natural Products



ConsumerLab.com

Tests products for quality, quantity and purity of ingredients.



U.S. Pharmacopeia

A non-governmental lab that verifies quality, purity and potency of products.



Certified Vegan

Verifies that products contain no animal ingredients or by products.



TruLabel

Verifies ingredients match label. The TruLabel logo is not placed on product. A list of certified products can be found at www.npainfo.org.

Selecting Natural Products, *continued*

Product Quality & Ingredients

Recent FDA manufacturing regulations have been implemented to better ensure product consistency. The new laws are meant to standardize products, but independent testing has identified products with up to 40 times the amount of stated ingredients, as well as some products with no active ingredient at all.

Some natural products or supplements contain a single ingredient, whereas others may contain several dozen. Each manufacturer may produce a unique product formulation in any number of different strengths. Specific to herbal products, factors including the maturity and growing conditions of the plant, its handling and storage, and the specific part of the plant used can all affect the quality of the final product. These differences make it difficult to know the quality of

the ingredients found in many herbal products. Selecting a product from a trusted brand is always a sensible choice: Ask your doctor or pharmacist for recommendations.

Consulting a professional

Choosing a quality natural product is important, but knowing when or if to use one is equally important. There is usually nothing wrong with taking a natural product to boost your health, but consulting a health care professional is usually preferred. Serious diseases require professional care and should not be self-treated. Taking a natural product of your own choice after your physician has prescribed treatment may not be the right thing to do either and could cause an unintended drug interaction. If you are taking a prescription product, always talk to a health care provider prior to starting a natural product.

Commonly Used Natural Supplements

The following table provides selected information on commonly used supplements. All supplements may interact with medications: Tell all of your health care providers if you use or plan to use a natural product, especially if you have a scheduled surgery. The information in this table is not exhaustive and is not an endorsement for use.

	Evidence for Use	Poor Evidence for Use	Side Effects	Precautions
Coenzyme Q10	Blood pressure, heart failure	Migraines, Parkinson's	Itching, rash, insomnia, dizziness, irritability	Smoking and use of statins decrease coenzyme Q10 levels
Echinacea	Common cold	Stimulation of the immune system, yeast infections	Constipation, dry mouth, headache, dizziness, insomnia	Asthma, allergies to similar plants (ragweed, marigolds, daisies)
Fish Oil (Omega 3)	High cholesterol, heart health	Osteoporosis, dermatitis, arthritis	Fishy aftertaste or belching	Allergies to fish or nuts
Garlic	High cholesterol	Prevention of heart attacks, high blood pressure	Irritation of mouth or throat	Ulcers, GERD
Ginkgo	Memory loss	Asthma, depression, glaucoma, PMS	Headache, dizziness	Seizure disorders; potentially serious allergic reactions
Glucosamine	Arthritis	Diabetes, glaucoma, leg pain	Headache, insomnia, sun sensitivity, nail toughening, cramps	Allergy to shellfish; may take several months for effects to be seen
Melatonin	Insomnia, jet lag	ADHD, memory, depression, headache prevention, high blood pressure	Fatigue, dizziness, headache, drowsiness	Depression
Red Yeast Rice	High cholesterol	Heart disease, diabetes	Muscle pain, heartburn, bloating, dizziness	Liver disease, pregnancy, breast feeding, alcohol, grapefruit juice
Saw Palmetto	Enlarged prostate	Hair loss, prostate cancer	Dizziness, headache, constipation, impotence	Will not treat prostate cancer

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