



Ask The Pharmacist

Vitamin And Supplement Safety Tips

by Paul Reyes, RPh

(NAPSA)—Each day, millions of Americans take dietary supplements, including vitamins and minerals, in an effort to stay healthy and fill dietary gaps.

However, they are not risk-free. Some supplements can be dangerous



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if taken with certain medications or may have harmful side effects. Talking to your doctor or pharmacist before taking a supplement can help you find out if it is safe for

you to use. Here are some guidelines to follow before taking a supplement:

• **Drug interactions:**

Remember to tell your doctor about any dietary supplements you are taking when starting a prescription medication. Certain supplements, especially when taken in excess, have serious side effects and can have dangerous interactions when taken with prescription medications.

• **Follow guidelines:** There are different types and amounts of vitamins and supplements that are needed, depending on your age, gender and lifestyle. Talk to your pharmacist or doctor about which one is right for you.

• **Keep your guard up:** Just because the label says “all natural” doesn’t mean that the product is safe or effective. The supplement industry is generally unregulated, so potency and ingredients can vary widely. Also, be wary of any curative claims made about a product without sound scientific research to back it up.

• **No substitutions:** Never substitute prescribed medications with vitamins or supplements.



Before taking any dietary supplements, you may want to discuss them with your doctor or your pharmacist.

Chances are it will not have the same effect and may even be dangerous. If cost is an issue, discuss lower-priced medication options with your doctor, such as switching to a generic drug or using a mail-order pharmacy for medications taken on an ongoing basis.

• **Don't overdo it:** If you are taking a supplement, don't exceed the recommended amount. Some products can be harmful when you take a large dose or take them for a long time.

• **Do not self-diagnose:** The best thing you can do before taking vitamins is to ask your doctor or pharmacist what your needs are and what's safe and effective for you. Remember that supplements are not intended to treat, prevent or cure a disease.

For more information, visit www.medco.com.

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