



# HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS : What Do You Need To Know ?

## WHAT ARE HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS?

There are many terms used to describe health supplements and alternative medicines. These include complementary medicines, dietary supplements, herbal supplements and vitamins. They can be found in many different preparations including teas, capsules, powders and soft gels.

**Health supplements** are products (other than tobacco) intended to supplement the diet and bears or contains one or more of the following dietary ingredients: a vitamin, mineral, amino acid or herb.

**Vitamins** are nutrients that are not produced by the body, but are required for optimal physical performance. Most vitamins are present in a healthy balanced diet.

**Minerals** are nutrients needed in small amounts to help the body to function properly. They serve as building blocks for teeth, bones, other cells and enzymes. They also help to regulate the fluid level in the body, deliver oxygen and carry away carbon dioxide, and facilitate the function of the nervous system.

**Herbal remedies** are mainly derived from natural sources and are used to reduce a wide variety of diseases and conditions, from common cold, menopause to memory loss.

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW WHEN CONSUMING HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS?

When choosing and buying health supplements or herbal products, it is important to think of them as one component of a healthy diet and **NOT** as a substitute for eating well.

### Remember . . .

- Health supplements and herbal remedies are not subject to the same government regulations and standards as conventional medicines. Without stringent testing, it is difficult to determine the safety and effectiveness of these supplements.
- Do not take too much of different multi-vitamin and multi-mineral preparations as an overdose of some vitamins and minerals may do more harm than good to the body.





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- You should consult your pharmacist or doctor before taking health supplements or herbal products. When visiting a doctor, pharmacist, dentist or nurse, always inform them if you are taking any health supplements or herbal medicines.
- Certain groups of people should take extra care when choosing health supplements:
  1. Pregnant or breastfeeding women
  2. Children under the age of 18 and adults over the age of 65 – limited testing is done on the effects of supplements on children and the elderly
  3. People with certain medical conditions (eg. those with diabetes or heart disease) or are already taking conventional medicines
- Read the label and follow the instructions.
- Avoid products that make irrational claims such as miracle cure, etc.
- Pay attention to expiry dates and storage conditions.

**Remember : 'Herbal' or 'Natural' does not automatically mean safe to consume!**

- The Singaporean Health Sciences Authority (HSA) regularly reports on alternative medicines that have been mixed illegally with conventional medicines. THESE CAN BE DANGEROUS.

**GOLDEN RULES:**

**Take health supplements and alternative medicines with care. ALWAYS inform your health professionals of all supplements and medicines you are taking.**

**An overdose of health supplements can be harmful.**

**There is no magic cure for being overweight, memory loss, fatigue, lack of vitality or stress.**

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*The information in this leaflet is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.*

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