

# Be supplement savvy

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Americans spent more than \$25 billion on dietary supplements in 2008. With figures like that, you've likely been tempted by the promise of nutritional health aids in a bottle. Experts speculate that as our nation faces rising health-care costs, more people are turning to these supplements as a substitute for doctor visits and expensive prescriptions. While many supplements can provide much-needed nutrients or fill in the gaps of a poor diet, there is no substitute for either a physician's care or a well-balanced diet. In addition, it is extremely important to consult a trusted health-care professional before taking any supplement, because many are as powerful as prescription drugs. Consider the following before making a purchase:

## General safety questions

- Is this made by a reputable manufacturer?
- Can I get more information about this product by phone or via an informative website?
  - What does my pharmacist or nutritionist think of this product?
  - Why do I need this supplement?
  - What is the suggested serving size?
  - Will I be able to swallow a pill, or do I need a chewable or liquid version?

## What to look for on the label

**Ingredients** Check for filler ingredients or anything you might be allergic to.

**USP verification** Look for a seal offering proof that the supplement has passed USP's requirements for quality.

**Percentage of Daily Values** Be sure these do not exceed 500 percent (unless greater amounts have been recommended by your doctor).

**"Best by" dates** Make sure the product hasn't expired, since some supplements lose their potency over time.

## Potential side effects

**Calcium or iron pills** May cause constipation if taken on an empty stomach.

**Magnesium or vitamin C** Can result in diarrhea if taken in large doses.

**Fish oil capsules** Can lead to "fish burps" if not kept refrigerated.

**Multivitamins** Can cause nausea if not taken with food.

## Reliable resources on nutritional supplements

United States Pharmacopeial Convention (USP) [www.usp.org](http://www.usp.org)

ConsumerLab.com [www.consumerlab.com](http://www.consumerlab.com)

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Mayo Clinic [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

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