



The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System — Serving New Jersey Since 1983



NEWS RELEASE

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Resolutions to Shed the Holiday Pounds -- Dietary Supplements May Be Cause for Concern --

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New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES)

Available for Interviews

Newark, N.J. — Jan. 2012 — It's now January and many of us overindulged during the holidays, packing on the pounds and now feeling guilty. This leaves us in a position to look for a "quick fix" to help shed those extra pounds and dietary supplements seem to be the plausible answer. Consumers are bombarded with commercials promising "weight loss in a pill," without ever having to exercise. The NJ Poison Experts caution consumers to beware of such claims, often times unproven and sometimes dangerous, because dietary supplements aren't always what they seem. They can contain contaminants, be addictive and interact poorly with medications and even cause uncomfortable or unhealthy side effects.

The Food and Drug Administration defines a dietary supplement as any product that is intended to supplement the diet that contains one or more ingredients including a vitamin, mineral, herb or botanical, amino acid, concentrate, metabolite, constituent, extract or any combination of these ingredients.¹ Thousands of dietary supplements are sold in the U.S. today at retail stores and over the Internet. Consumers must be aware that dietary supplements are regulated differently than drug and food products, exposing users to potential dangers to their health.

"The evidence supports the fact that there is an increase annually in U.S. adults incorporating dietary supplements into their diets. This can be good and bad news," according to Dr. Steven Marcus, executive and medical director of NJPIES. "For some, dietary supplements will improve one's health, but consumers need to heed warnings and be aware of all of the ingredients in the dietary supplement they take. Some ingredients can result in side effects, from diarrhea to racing heartbeat and more."

A voluntary test and audit program for dietary supplement manufacturers is available through The United States Pharmacopeial Convention.² USP is a not-for-profit organization that offers dietary manufacturers voluntary verification services, and all dietary supplements that are put through the USP's testing and verification process can display the USP verified mark. According to Marcus, even if the supplement has the USP mark on the product, it is wise for consumers to do serious research and check with their physician before ingesting any of these supplements. With the annual weight-loss resolution season upon us, it is important to recognize that there is no magic bullet or diet supplement that will solve this issue. Keep these tips in mind before using dietary supplements:³

- Avoid dietary supplements that you don't need.
- Select supplements with only the ingredient(s) that you need.
- Avoid supplements with more than one herbal ingredient.
- Consult your pharmacist or physician if you take prescription medications or have health conditions.

¹ The Food and Drug Administration; Dietary Supplements Labels Database; <http://dietarysupplements.nlm.nih.gov/dietary/faq.jsp>

² U.S. Pharmacopeia; The USP Dietary Supplement Verification Program;
http://www.usp.org/USPVerified/dietarysupplements/index.html?USP_Print

³ The Hidden Dangers of Dietary Supplements; <http://www.doctoroz.com/media/print/3764>

- Avoid supplements sold to “treat” an illness. [If a supplement states it is to treat an illness, the FDA has authority to regulate it and remove it from the market!]
- Avoid supplements that claim to help you lose weight or improve your sexual or athletic performance.
- Purchase supplements at retail, not over the Internet.
- If you experience a side effect, stop using the supplement and inform your physician and the FDA.

Below is a list of nutrients and supplements with their associated symptoms from regular use, misuse, or overdose.⁴ For further information, please call the NJ Poison Experts at 1-800-222-1222 (24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year).

Vitamin A: Large doses may cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, fatigue, irritability, bone pain, hair loss, increased pressure on the brain, blood coagulation changes, liver damage, and increased blood calcium.

Vitamin D: Large doses may cause headache, weight loss, nausea, vomiting, kidney damage, and irregular heart rhythm associated with high blood calcium levels.

Vitamin C: Chronic large doses have been possibly implicated in kidney stone formation.

Vitamin E: Large doses have been associated with headache, fatigue, GI upset, and increased bleeding tendencies.

Vitamin K: Large swings in Vitamin K intake may make regulation of therapy with prescription blood thinners (warfarin) more difficult.

Niacin (Vitamin B3): Transient side effects with therapeutic/regular doses include flushing, itching, GI upset, and a rise in blood sugar. Chronic large doses, as in treatment of high cholesterol, may damage the liver.

Pyridoxine (Vitamin B6): Chronic extra-large doses may cause nerve damage with symptoms of numbness, tingling, pain, clumsiness, and loss of coordination.

Magnesium: Large doses, especially in patients with reduced kidney function, can cause flushing, nausea, vomiting, low blood pressure, and irregular heart rhythms. In serious cases, impaired consciousness and difficulty breathing may occur.

Potassium: Large doses, especially in patients with impaired kidney function, can cause vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, numbness, and muscle cramps. In serious cases, low blood pressure and life-threatening irregular heart rhythms may occur.

Chromium: Therapeutic/regular doses may cause stomach upset. Large doses can lead to kidney or liver damage, and irregular blood cell counts.

Colloidal Silver: Taking this can cause argyria, a permanent blue-grey discoloration of the skin and eyes.

Kava Kava: Chronic use may cause kidney or liver damage, weight loss, shortness of breath, blood cell count changes, and rash.

Guarana, Green Tea, Kola Nut, Theobroma (Natural Caffeine Sources): Large doses may cause irregular heart rhythms, chest palpitations, increased heart rate, and nervous system stimulation.

St. John’s Wort: Many drug-drug interactions may occur with this supplement. For example, use with prescription antidepressants may cause serotonin syndrome with symptoms of high blood pressure, elevated heart rate, anxiousness, and sweatiness. Chronic therapeutic/regular use may cause stomach upset, fatigue, confusion, and tiredness.

Ginseng: Chronic use may cause vaginal bleeding, breast pain, mental status changes, and severe rash. A ginseng abuse syndrome has been reported following long-term use and includes the development of high blood pressure, nervousness, insomnia, and morning diarrhea.

Ginko: Chronic use can prolong bleeding time as well as cause stomach upset, nausea, chest palpitations, allergic skin reactions, and may lower the seizure threshold.

⁴ The Illinois Poison Center Blog; [Nutritional Supplements: Are the Benefits Worth the Cost?](http://ipcblog.org/2011/05/10/are-the-benefits-worth-the-cost-nutritional-supplements); <http://ipcblog.org/2011/05/10/are-the-benefits-worth-the-cost-nutritional-supplements>

Industry background

According to the FDA's website MedWatch, some dietary supplements contain lead, arsenic and mercury. In addition, the FDA reports that some supplements have ingredients that are addictive and/or stimulants that can cause hyperactivity, increased heart rate and insomnia. Some ingredients may also interact negatively with certain health conditions and prescription medications.

Generally, manufacturers do not need to register their products with the FDA nor get FDA approval before producing or selling dietary supplements. Since the FDA does not regulate supplement manufacturers, these manufacturers and distributors are not required to prove the effectiveness of their product nor do they have to tell consumers the possible side effects.

The FDA regulates dietary supplements under a different set of regulations than those covering "conventional" food and drug products (prescription and over the counter). Under the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA), the dietary supplement manufacturer is responsible for ensuring that a dietary supplement is safe before it is marketed. FDA's post-marketing responsibilities include monitoring safety — e.g., voluntary dietary supplement adverse event reporting; product information, such as labeling, claims and package inserts; and accompanying literature. The FDA is responsible for taking action against any unsafe dietary supplement product after it reaches the market. Manufacturers must make sure that product label information is truthful and not misleading.⁵

Domestic and foreign facilities that manufacture/process, pack or hold food for human or animal consumption in the U.S. are required to register their facility with the FDA. For more information, see [Registration of Food Facilities](#). The Federal Trade Commission regulates dietary supplement advertising.

Call to Action – Help is Just a Phone Call Away

NJPIES leaders urge medical professionals, parents, educators, caregivers and the general public to call the toll-free poison center hot line, 800-222-1222, with any poison related question as well as for non-emergency questions regarding medications, household products, plants, environmental contaminants, or other poisons. The hotline is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The NJ poison experts recommend putting the number in all family cell phones as well as programming it as a speed dial number on landlines. In addition, the hotline number should be prominently posted near all phones in the home. Real People. Real Answers.

About NJPIES

As New Jersey's only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hot line services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of the New Jersey Medical School of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, it has a state-of-the-art center located on the school's Newark campus.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the toll-free hot line, **800-222-1222**, any time. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **973-972-9280**.

About UMDNJ

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is the nation's largest freestanding public health sciences university, with more than 5,500 students attending. The state's three medical schools, a dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health-related professions, a school of nursing and a school of public health are housed on five campuses — Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. Annually, there are more than 2 million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at the campuses. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a level I trauma center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction services network.

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⁵ FDA; Dietary Supplements; <http://www.fda.gov/food/dietarysupplements/default.htm>