

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

## NEWS RELEASE

Media to contact:  
800-222-1222  
800-962-1253 if outside NJ

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### “Natural” Doesn’t Mean Safe and Effective - Dietary Supplements 101 -

**(Newark, NJ)** – As spring (and spring break) quickly approaches, many are starting to get back in shape after a long winter. For most, this means a strict regimen of diet and exercise, but with only a few short weeks until beach season, some may look to dietary supplements for a quick fix. Although many supplements are safe when used as directed on the label, there are supplements on the market that may be ineffective and even dangerous. NJ Poison Control experts caution consumers to beware of claims that seem too good to be true, and to consult a medical professional before introducing dietary supplements.

“Supplements on the market, even those sold at reputable health food stores, are not tested and regulated for safety and effectiveness the same way prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) drugs are,” warns Diane Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director of the [NJ Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine](#). “A dietary supplement is considered safe until it is proven unsafe, unlike drugs which are considered unsafe until proven safe by research and clinical trial testing.”

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates dietary supplements as food, not as drugs, therefore the responsibility of evaluating the safety, effectiveness and labeling integrity of a supplement is left to the manufacturer, not the FDA. “Consumers must be aware of the potential health risks of dietary supplements. Products may contain hidden ingredients (not listed on the label), be addictive, contain recalled/illegal ingredients, interact poorly with other medicines, be contaminated with toxic heavy metals, pesticides, and other contaminants, or cause dangerous unknown side effects,” says Calello.

Consumers should be skeptical when purchasing products online, especially health-related products. Just because a product is sold over-the-counter (OTC) or on the Internet, doesn’t mean the product is safe and/or without side effects; remember all medicines have side effects, even prescription drugs. Be sure to research the products and consult your healthcare provider before buying or using any supplement. Since this is an industry with fewer regulations, it’s easier for manufacturers to make false claims about the safety and effectiveness of their products.

If you do decide to incorporate supplements into your daily living, be a safe and informed consumer. Keep these tips in mind;

- Regularly check the FDA’s [Medication Health Fraud](#) webpage for health products that have been flagged by the FDA.
- Select supplements with only the ingredient(s) you need. The more ingredients, the greater the chances of harmful side effects.
- Look for supplements with the USP or NF on the label. This indicates that the manufacturer of the product followed standards set by the US Pharmacopoeia in making the product.

- Be sure to follow the dosing instructions on the label; do not take more than the manufacturer recommends. More does not mean better. Large doses of dietary supplements can result in toxic effects such as overdose.
- Use caution with alternative medicine products; some have been found to contain toxic heavy metals such as arsenic, lead and mercury.
- Substituting a supplement for a prescription medicine or therapy can be dangerous.
- Consult your pharmacist or healthcare provider if you are currently taking prescription medicines or have a chronic health condition.
- While pregnant or breastfeeding, only take supplements recommended or prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- The term “all natural” does not guarantee the product is safe and effective. In fact, many of these products are tainted with prescription drugs, recalled ingredients, and other chemicals not listed on the label.
- Be skeptical of any product claiming to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent disease or chronic medical conditions (i.e. Alzheimer’s, diabetes, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, autism, multiple sclerosis, etc.).
- Start with one supplement at a time in case you experience side effects. If feeling unwell, stop taking the product and report effects to your healthcare provider and the [FDA](#).
- Some supplements can cause serious problems during or after a surgical procedure/operation including dental surgery. Be sure to discuss all supplements with your surgeon.
- Avoid supplements that claim to help you lose weight or improve your sexual or athletic performance. This includes products that advertise they are a legal alternative to anabolic steroids.
- Purchase supplements at retail stores, not over the Internet or via mass email marketing.
- Spot false claims; if a product sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Overdose is a serious concern with any medicine including herbal, dietary and fitness supplements. If you have questions regarding a supplement or are experiencing unwanted side effects from a supplement, the medical professionals at the [NJ Poison Control Center](#) are available to provide expert, medical treatment advice.

Call, text, or chat for free, 24/7/365. Save the Poison Help line, 1-800-222-1222, in your phone today to be prepared for what may happen tomorrow, ([www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org)).

### **Help is Just a Phone Call Away!**

Stay Connected: Facebook ([@NJPIES](#)) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](#)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

### **Real People. Real Answers.**

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#### **Available for Media Interviews**

Diane P. Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director, New Jersey Poison Control Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine

Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Managing Director, New Jersey Poison Control Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine

### **About NJPIES**

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) is New Jersey's only poison control center. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer free consultation through hotline services (telephone, text and chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. In addition, it tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the New Jersey Department of Health, U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NJPIES' confidential services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. When needed, NJPIES responds to other emergent health issues by expanding hotline services.

NJPIES is designated as the state's regional poison control center by the New Jersey Department of Health and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a division of the Department of Emergency Medicine of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers Health Sciences in Newark. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health, NJ Hospitals and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

New Jersey residents should save the Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222, in their mobile phones and post the number somewhere visible in their home. NJPIES is also available via text [8002221222@njpies.org](text:8002221222@njpies.org) and chat [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org). Stay Connected: [FB](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Website](#)

### **About Rutgers**

Established in 1766, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and one of the nation's premier public research universities. Serving more than 65,000 students on campuses, centers, institutes and other locations throughout the state, Rutgers is the only public university in New Jersey that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) is the health care education, research, and clinical division of Rutgers University, comprising nine schools and their attendant faculty practices, centers, institutes and clinics; New Jersey's leading comprehensive cancer care center; and New Jersey's largest behavioral health care network.

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