



Ontario Home Economics Association

C O M M U N I Q U É

Ask A Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Dietary Supplements - Ask Before Swallowing!

Ever wondered what exactly is in those mossy green pills you swallowed - other than the obscure herb itself? And that pungent aroma - can you safely assume that it comes from the medicinal sources, only?

What assurance do you have that the dietary supplement may be effective for your condition? Or, during a course of treatment, that it is actually working?

Our lips and mouths allow us to ask questions and ingest substances. We have the option of exercising the first before performing the second.

Professional Home Economist Carol T. Culhane, of Toronto, recognized internationally as an expert in functional foods, nutraceuticals and natural health products, and President of International Food Focus, offers some important questions that will empower you to use your gift of speech to protect your gift of health.

As of January 1, 2004, dietary supplements are now officially recognized as Natural Health Products (NHPs) in Canada. Despite the new regulations, Carol Culhane recommends that a wise consumer should still ask questions and, further, be made aware of the type of regulatory reform underway to ensure that these sorts of issues are dealt with before an NHP is launched in Canada.

Know What Effect to Expect

Ask these questions of the retailer where you purchase the dietary supplement. If purchasing from a pharmacy, ask the pharmacist.

Effect:

- What effect can you expect from taking this dietary supplement?
- Are there any side effects you should know about?
- Are there any known complications when taken with other dietary supplements or with any medicine?
- How will you know this dietary supplement is working, or improving your health, or possibly having a negative effect on your health?

Amount to Take:

- How many tablets or servings are required on a daily basis for the dietary supplement to be effective?
- Is this a reasonable amount for you to incorporate into your daily regime?
- Are there studies that prove that this amount is necessary and safe for the expected results?

Support for the Claimed Effect and Your Expectations:

- What human studies have been conducted to support the claimed health benefit?
- What effects, both expected and unexpected, resulted from these studies?
- How has the manufacturer managed any unexpected side effects?
- What type of people participated in these studies and are they like you? Do they match your gender, age group or lifestyle? If there are striking differences between you and the subjects of the studies, you may experience either no effect or unexpected effects from the dietary supplement.

Independent Review:

- Who or which institutions conducted the research being used to support the sale of the dietary supplement?
- Who paid for the studies? Have the studies been reviewed by any independent professional third parties? Have the studies been published, and how can you get a copy?

Endorsement:

- What are the professional qualifications of anyone endorsing the dietary supplement? If their title is “Dr.,” what is the subject matter of this designation? A Dr. in Philosophy does not qualify a person to evaluate the effects and safety of a dietary supplement. If a university is associated with the dietary supplement, check to make sure it truly exists, or has a department of nutrition or medicine.

Know the Manufacturer of the Dietary Supplement

As above, ask these questions of the retailer where you purchase the supplement. If purchasing from a pharmacy, ask the pharmacist.

Hygiene:

- In which country is the dietary supplement manufactured? What hygienic standards has the manufacturer set for itself? What agency, if any, monitors compliance with these standards?

Purity and Quality Assurance:

- Does the label declare all the ingredients in the dietary supplement? Does each dose deliver the same amount of active ingredient? Does the label tell you how much of the active ingredient is in each dose? What is your assurance of this consistency?

Know Who to Consult

Ask your healthcare provider:

- If they are familiar with this dietary supplement?
- How the dietary supplement fits in with your current healthcare program and any medicine you are currently taking?
- If they know this manufacturer?
- If they have any particular cautions or advice?
- Are they aware of a more suitable dietary supplement?

Know Yourself

Ask yourself:

- Why do you think you need this supplement?
- Can you get these same nutrients from a healthy diet?
- Does your healthcare provider know you are taking this supplement?
- What do you expect to gain from taking it?
- How much will it cost you to take the recommended amount on a weekly basis? Can you afford it?

These “knows” will result in “yes’s” as you become a better informed, more assertive and increasingly confident participant in your self-care. You will learn how to better protect your health, manage your health care and control your healthcare costs.

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Carol T. Culhane is a Professional Home Economist and President of International Food Focus (www.foodfocus.on.ca). As an international expert, Carol consults to food and pharmaceutical manufacturers worldwide, assisting them in acquiring regulatory approval for their products and marketing the products in a manner that fulfills consumers needs. Ms. Culhane is a sought after speaker and prolific writer, addressing healthcare and related professionals, the food and pharmaceutical manufacturing sectors, the natural health products sector, and consumers interested in becoming better decision makers and more informed participants in their self-care. Carol is a member of the Ontario Home Economics Association.

The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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