

Safe Use of Natural Health Products

What are Natural Health Products?

Natural health products (NHP) are made from plants and other natural substances. Examples are herbal supplements, vitamins, minerals, homeopathic remedies, and omega oils.

People may take NHP to prevent or treat health conditions, or to feel healthy. You do not need a prescription for NHP. NHP are not regulated as strictly as drugs.

Natural does not mean safer. Some possible concerns with using NHP are:

- Contamination with pesticides, prescription and non-prescription drugs, heavy metals, and bacteria in some NHP. These may be harmful to your health.
- Different forms, types or amounts of ingredients may be used in research compared to NHP sold in stores. The product may work differently or have side effects.
- False claims about the benefits of certain NHP may be made in advertising or articles. NHP cannot cure diseases such as cancer and diabetes.
- Lack of safety information. Some NHP may be unsafe for pregnant women, children, or people with health conditions such as kidney or liver failure.
- NHP may interact with medications or other NHP you are already taking.
- NHP can have side effects or cause allergic reactions.

What can I do to use Natural Health Products safely?

- Look for scientific evidence that proves the NHP can treat your condition. Personal success stories are not evidence.
- Find out about possible side effects caused by the NHP.
- Ask your pharmacist to review your medications for potential interactions.
- Ask your health care provider who knows your medical history if a NHP is safe for you.
- Follow the instructions for use. Do not take more than the recommended dosage.
- Report negative reactions to a NHP to Health Canada (Adverse Reaction and Medical Device Problem Reporting) and your health care provider.

What do I look for when buying NHP?

- Always use a trusted brand of NHP.
- Check the label. It must list the product name, all medicinal and non-medicinal ingredients, and the quantity of product in container. NHP must have a Natural Product Number (NPN) or Homeopathic Medicine Number (DIN-HM) and a Health Canada product licence number. The recommended purpose, dose and method of taking the NHP are required. Warnings, side effects, contra-indications, and special storage instructions must be listed.

Where can I find more information?

Use website sites that provide scientific information and are not selling or advertising products.

A few good website are:

1. National Institute of Health
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/safety/topics.htm>
2. National Library of Medicine
<https://medlineplus.gov/vitamins.html>
3. Health Canada
www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/natural-non-prescription/information-sheet-5-consumers-informing-yourself-informing-you-about-natural-health-products-health-canada.html
4. Health Link BC
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>

Or Dial 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian.

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