

Patient Information

But Does It Work?

MANY PEOPLE TRY HERBAL OR OTHER NATURAL PRODUCTS AND FOOD SUPPLEMENTS TO CARE FOR THEIR HEALTH AND EVEN FOR THEIR DIABETES. IN FACT, IN THE UNITED STATES, ABOUT 38% OF ADULTS USE SOME FORM OF THESE PRODUCTS. PEOPLE WITH DIABETES ARE 1.6 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO USE THEM THAN THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

Many of these products make claims about benefits for diabetes, or you may hear about them from your friends or family members who have taken them. But, some of these products are very costly. So, before you decide to take them, learning more about these products and how to evaluate them can help you make a more informed choice about whether you want to use them.

Information

Because these products are food supplements and not medicines, they are not regulated the same way as prescription and over-the-counter medicines. For example, they do not have to meet the same research guidelines about how well the products work. They are required to show that their products are safe and to have a Supplement Facts label, similar to the Nutrition Facts label you find on packaged foods.

Evaluation

These products often make many claims about their benefits. Just because it is in print or even on the Internet does not make it true. Keep in mind that when you do an Internet search, many of the sites that come up first on the list are sites designed to sell the product. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.

Some questions you can use to evaluate a product in a print ad or on the Internet are listed below.

- Is the information clear and easy to understand?
- Are there sites or sources that have tested the product other than those who are selling it?
- Are there research studies showing that the product works, or are there only stories from people who have used it?
- If there are studies, were they done in the United States or in other countries where food and daily diets are different?

- Who is providing the information, and what is their background?
- If universities are mentioned, are they well known?
- Are the ingredients listed?

Questions to Ask

For your own safety, be sure to let your health care provider or pharmacist know if you are using any of these products. Some of these may interact with other medicines you are taking. In addition, your health care team can be a great source of information. Some questions to ask them are listed below.

- Is there any research showing that this product can improve my blood glucose or my health?
- Is this product safe for me?
- Could this product interact with any other medicine I take or medical conditions I have?
- How much should I take and how often?
- Are there any known side effects?
- Are there times when I should stop taking it?
- How can I tell if this product is working?

As a person with diabetes, you need to be a smart consumer of any products you use to manage your illness. Learning all you can about herbal and food supplements and other natural products can help you spend your money wisely and keep you safe.

Online Resources for More Information

- Consumer Lab (an independent organization that tests nutritional products and supplements): www.consumerlab.com
- American Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.org



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