

Information for Using a Nonprescription Weight-Loss Supplement

Be aware that the FDA doesn't evaluate dietary supplements for effectiveness, only for safety if the supplements contain new ingredients or consumers have reported adverse reactions.

In recent years, several studies have found that dietary supplements frequently contain unsafe ingredients and/or ingredients not listed on the label, including prescription weight-loss medications. They also may not contain the amount of a specific ingredient listed on the label.

To protect yourself should you try a weight-loss supplement, take the following steps:

1. Consult your physician before you begin taking a weight-loss supplement so he or she can perform baseline tests, including heart rate, blood pressure, and liver enzymes. Ask whether the supplement is compatible with any prescription medications or other supplements you're already taking. You may want to ask your physician whether prescription weight-loss medications may be useful for you, as the FDA evaluates them before marketing and strictly regulates them for safety.
2. Carefully research the different types of weight-loss supplements and buy only from reputable sources. Many items are produced in other countries and may include ingredients that the FDA has banned in the United States. Many manufacturers have been found to use ingredients that aren't the active form of an herb or that aren't disclosed on the label. Common allergens such as wheat and soy and prescription medications are just a few examples of "extra" ingredients found in some weight-loss supplements.
3. Monitor your health while taking any supplement. If you experience any of the following symptoms, discontinue use and see your physician immediately: nausea, vomiting, upset stomach, gas or bloating, diarrhea or loose stools, dizziness or vertigo, blurred vision, rapid heartbeat, insomnia or trouble sleeping, headaches, seizures, or increased anxiety.
4. If you have any allergies, determine whether the dietary supplement contains allergens. The allergens most frequently found in weight-loss supplements are wheat, soy, and milk, although some contain shellfish as well. Beware that independent testing has found that the presence of these allergens isn't always listed on the label.
5. If you consume large amounts of caffeine (a medium-sized coffee or more daily), check whether the supplement you're considering contains caffeine. Ingredients commonly found in supplements that may include caffeine are coffee extract, tea extract, guarana, and yerba mate.
6. See your physician six weeks after beginning to take a weight-loss supplement to repeat health-monitoring testing to determine whether there have been any negative changes.
7. All weight-loss supplements and medications work best with lifestyle modifications, including dietary changes and increased physical activity. Before you begin taking a supplement, determine where you can get support for these kinds of changes.