

Questions to Ask Before Buying That Supplement

How do you evaluate whether or not you really need a dietary supplement or other pill? Ask yourself the questions below to help you decide.

NEED

- **Why do I think I need this supplement?** If you follow the Food Guide Pyramid you probably don't need a supplement. You may need a supplement if: 1) you are a woman who plans to have children; 2) you are now pregnant or nursing; 3) you are over 50 years of age; 4) you follow a strict vegetarian diet. Your doctor may also prescribe a supplement based on your medical history.
- **Does my doctor know that I am taking this pill?** Vitamin, mineral or herb pills may affect the medicine you take. Talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider.
- **What do I expect to gain from taking this pill?** The label may promise "quick energy" or to "reduce stress." Don't believe it! Also, a pill is not a "quick fix" for a poor diet.

SAFETY

- **Do I know what is in the pill?** New labels on supplements give you more information about what is in the pill.
- **Are there any side effects?** The new labels list possible side effects.

EFFECTIVENESS

- **How can I tell if this pill is working?** You and your doctor should discuss how you will know your health is better. However, if you choose to take an herb or other dietary supplement on your own, you may feel better quickly. Is this due to the pill? Not always. Many times symptoms go away on their own.
- **Does what I eat affect how this pill will work?** Foods you eat may affect how well the pill works. Ask your doctor or a pharmacist if you are not sure.
- **Do studies show that this pill is effective?** Research, especially on large numbers of humans, is important.

References: 1. Adapted from an American Dietetic Association press release, November 8, 1999
 2. "Food vs. Pills," Colorado State University Coop. Ext., 12/98,
 <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/PUBS/FOODNUT/09338.html>

Written By: Ellen Schuster, M.S., R.D.
 OSU Extension Service
 Family and Community Development Program

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