



How Healthy are Dietary Supplements?

What You Don't Know Could Impact Your Health

As Sailors and Marines, maintaining a healthy weight is part of your job. Being underweight or overweight can hurt your career, delay your readiness, and weaken your resilience. Eating a balanced diet, working out regularly, and living a healthy lifestyle are critical to your long-term success. You know all this. But what if you don't feel like you have the time to dedicate yourself to managing your weight? Have you ever thought that taking a dietary supplement might help you reach your goal faster and easier? Think again.

Dietary supplements are consumable products, such as liquids or tablets that contain a dietary ingredient intended to supplement the diet.¹ They are not meant to replace healthy eating and physical training. Nor are they expected to treat a medical condition or cure an illness. There are no overnight success stories when it comes to healthy weight management. Consider all the facts and talk to your health care provider before you take a dietary supplement.

Dietary Ingredients

- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Herbs/Botanicals
- Amino Acids
- Enzymes
- Metabolites

Harmful Stimulants

Stimulants are often included in dietary supplements for two reasons, they increase calorie burn (thermogenics) and they increase energy levels which in turn enhances exercise capabilities. More exercise builds more muscle and reduces body fat. What could be wrong with that? When it comes to your health, a lot could go wrong if you use dietary supplements that include stimulants.

Stimulants are a category of substances that alter the communication between your brain and the rest of your body.² Although there are several legal stimulants, such as caffeine, illegal stimulants must be avoided at all costs. Two stimulants, ephedrine and dimethylamylamine (DMAA), have been banned by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from use in all forms of dietary supplements, such as energy drinks, protein powders, and performance enhancing gels.² As such, the Department of Defense (DoD) prohibits the sale of these products at Military Exchanges, and service members are barred from taking supplements with

Supplement Forms

- Tablets
- Capsules
- Gels
- Liquids
- Powders



ephedrine and DMAA.² These stimulants can cause an increase in heart rate, raise blood pressure, and disrupt sleep.² They can also be highly addictive, much like cocaine and other illegal drugs.²

Health Risks

The health concerns associated with dietary supplements are every bit as real as the foods they attempt to replace. Some supplements have been found to cause irregular heartbeat, stroke, headaches, or other unfavorable reactions.² They may increase or decrease the effectiveness of prescription or over-the-counter medications.³ Supplements may also lead to positive drug tests because in the absence of FDA regulation there is no way of knowing if a dietary supplement contains an unidentified controlled substance.² Although a supplement facts label that discloses actual ingredients and net contents is required on all products,³ many manufacturers engage in misleading tactics. It should also be noted that excessive quantities of any stimulant, legal or illegal, can be harmful. That is why it is important to look for dietary supplements with third-party certification.

Third-Party Certification

Dietary supplements that include a third-party certification have been independently evaluated for purity and quality. Certification is not an endorsement of effectiveness, but it does verify that the product contains the ingredients listed on the label and no other substances. Examples of third-party certifications include:²

- United States Pharmacopeia (USP)
- NSF International
- Informed-Choice
- Banned Substances Control Group
- ConsumerLab.com



Additional Resources

For more information on specific supplements, dietary ingredients, tips on how to manage your weight safely and effectively, adverse events, and DoD policies go to:

- [Dietary Supplement Ingredients](#): Human Performance Resource Center, Operation Supplement Safety (OPSS)



NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER

PREVENTION AND PROTECTION START HERE



- [Dietary Supplements for Consumers](#): U. S. Food and Drug Administration
- [Food First, Supplements Second](#): Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) Health and Wellness Department (HPW)
- [HP Toolbox](#): Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) Health and Wellness Department (HPW)

References

¹ Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) 1994. S.784. 103rd Congress (1993-1994).

² Human Performance Resource Center. Operation Supplement Safety (OPSS). <http://hprc-online.org/dietary-supplements/opss/operation-supplement-safety-OPSS/opss-frequently-asked-questions-faqs-1/general-faqs>. Accessed 19 November 2014.

³ U. S. Food and Drug Administration. Q&A on Dietary Supplements. http://www.fda.gov/food/dietarysupplements/qadietarysupplements/default.htm#what_is Updated 20 March 2014. Accessed 19 November 2014.