



There's DANGER in assuming that just because a product boasts "NATURAL INGREDIENTS," it's good for you or even safe.

WHAT'S SAFER—AND WHAT TO SKIP

PICK: > **Single-ingredient supplements.**

"Most single-item products, like a simple vitamin or an individual mineral, are OK," ConsumerLab.com's Tod Cooperman, MD, says. "It's when you're dealing with a supplement with several ingredients that things have more potential to go wrong."

SKIP: > **Weight-loss, sexual-enhancement, and bodybuilding supplements,** which are often adulterated with prescription medications, steroids, or compounds chemically similar to prescription drugs, Dr. Cohen says.

> **Multih herbal supplements.**

Not only are you more likely to run into problems with quality, but it's also difficult to determine the effect that multiple herbs will have on your health due to potential interactions with other herbs or other drugs you're taking, Dr. Cohen says.

Rx: 4 REMEDIES TO TRY

Not all supplements are bad news. Here are a few that David Katz, MD, director of the Yale Prevention Research Center, recommends:

> **Vitamin D.** If you're deficient (your doctor can test to see) Dr. Katz advises taking 1,000 to 2,000 IU per day.

> **Omega-3 oil.** A gram a day can help reduce risk of heart disease, Dr. Katz says. His favorite: Krill-plex by Pure Encapsulations (purecaps.com).

> **Calcium.** If you don't get three daily servings of dairy, supplement with 1,000 milligrams every day.

> **Whole-food-based supplement.** Dr. Katz suggests one of these, such as Juice PLUS+ (juiceplus.com), instead of a multivitamin if you can't fit in five servings of produce a day.

What's in That Pill?

One potential cause of scary side effects: contaminants. In May, American Herbal Lab Inc. recalled Vita Breath—a dietary supplement marketed as an asthma remedy—after the FDA was notified about a patient with lead poisoning who'd reported taking Vita Breath and two other herbal products. As it turned out, a sample of the supplement contained more than 10,000 times the FDA's recommended maximum level of lead in candy. (American Herbal Lab Inc. did not respond to *Health's* multiple requests for comment.)

Also alarming: Some natural remedies may contain the very drugs their customers are trying to avoid. On July 16 of this year, the company J & H Besta Corp. recalled one lot of its Slim-30 Herb Supplement after FDA tests showed that the product contained traces of sibutramine, a prescription appetite suppressant that has side effects including increased blood pressure and heart rate. (In a press release, the company noted that it has "received no reports of illness associated with these products" and that it "deeply regrets any inconvenience caused to ... customers.")

"There are prescription drugs in some supposedly natural supplements," says Pieter Cohen, MD, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. "Some manufacturers have made it more difficult for the FDA to detect undeclared ingredients in their products by creating pharmaceutical analogues—they take the formula for an approved prescription drug and alter a few molecules, which makes the drug undetectable but basically creates a new prescription-strength drug that hasn't been tested by anyone." And that has the potential to create new side effects, Dr. Cohen says. The results can be shocking. "I've seen cases where people came into the ICU confused and lethargic—it turned out they were taking supplements contaminated with benzodiazepines, which are chemically similar to Valium," says John Papadopoulos, PharmD, director of pharmacotherapy at the New York University Langone Medical Center.

In 2006, the FDA issued warnings about two Brazilian dietary supplements, Emagrece Sim and Herbathin, that contained prescription ingredients as well

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