

Health Supplements 2002: Guide for the Perplexed

By David Zeiger, D.O.

In my integrative medical practice, patients will often bring in a number of health food supplements either self prescribed or recommended by other health care providers. Many times in patient interviews, I discover there is a lot of misunderstanding and confusion about the nature of these supplements as well as proper dosing to achieve a desired health benefit.

The health supplement industry has no universal standard regulations at present by any federal or state organization. This allows considerable variability in quality control of all nutritional and herbal supplements except homeopathic medicines.

There are several manufacturers that have applied stringent manufacturing quality control standards, and as such, assure high quality products to the consumer. These are considered by health care professionals to meet near 'pharmaceutical' quality. Other less stringently manufactured health supplements are regarded as 'food' quality and will often be manufactured under considerably less stringent GMP.

Companies that meet or exceed the GMP for herbal and nutritional supplements spend a considerable amount of time, money, and effort assuring the highest quality raw material, meticulous environmentally clean processing facilities, and maximum biological potency in whatever final form the product is made into, ie: tablet, capsule, liquid, powder, and a determined guaranteed shelf life.

Many of these companies employ full-time research staff further refining their products and exploring latest scientific findings. These companies will only distribute their products to health care professionals like physicians, dentists, and pharmacists. Food grade supplement companies have been found by independent laboratory testing to often not meet label claims for amount, biological potency, and purity, and may not even contain the label product itself – not to mention hidden ingredients. You can visit www.consumerlab.com for more information on this subject or even possibly check out your own supplement(s).

These supplements are often readily purchased via the internet, television/radio/newspaper/magazine ads, websites, commercial drug stores (not compounding pharmacies), health food stores, grocery chains, and especially multilevel marketing companies.

Caveat Emptor

If the product claims sound too good to be true – they probably are! People will spend more time checking out a television purchase then popping a supplement into their body! Your health is valuable – take time to realize that even what may appear a benign problem may actually represent a more significant health issue. It never hurts to take a few moments out of your busy schedule to ask your trusted health care professional, ie: integrative physician about your health concerns. Often you can save yourself a lot of time and money.

Nutraceuticals and Phytopharmaceuticals

The past 10 years has seen a rapid development in high quality nutritional (nutraceutical) and herbal (phyto-plant pharmaceutical) supplements. CoQ10, glutathione, lipoic acid, Quercetin, vinpocetine, plant sterols, chaste berry

(Vitex), St. Johns wort, SAME guggulipid, and Echinacea, are just a small handful that are now available in biologically stable and effective forms.

It is these more potent supplements that have generated awareness of possible drug-nutrient, nutrient-nutrient, herb-drug, and herb-nutrient, herb-herb interactions. The Natural Medicine's Comprehensive Data Base, on the Internet at www.NaturalDatabase.com, was one of the first attempts at collating this information.

Physicians can now be more informed in helping their patients avoid complications as well as assure the most appropriate supplement they should be on. Check with your integrative physician whenever you are considering taking a supplement.

Timing of certain supplements with medications and food can be important in maximizing health benefits, as well as avoiding possible undesired side-effects.

A mixture of branched chain amino acids are best taken 1-2 hours away from food, and generally the most therapeutic dosage is 2-4 grams taken 3-4 times a day. Digestive enzymes are best taken with the meal or immediately afterwards. Multivitamin mineral supplement should be taken at least 2-3 times a day for maximum benefit – there is no such thing as a 'one-a day.' Remember, supplements are just that – they supplement your diet. Most people eat at least 2 meals a day and that is often poorly balanced. With added stress and with food sources that have become more nutritionally deficient in the past several decades, everyone would benefit from at least a good basic multivitamin and mineral supplement 2 times a day!

Herbal supplements, be they Chinese, Ayurvedic, Western, or Tibetan, need to be taken according to specific recommendations of your qualified health care practitioner.

Some of the most respected companies are Orthomolecular, Metagenics, Health Concerns, Interplexus, Tyler, Allergy Research, PhytoPharmica, Biobotanical Research, K'An Herbal, Sun Ten, and Thorne Research.

Homeopathic Medicines

Homeopathic remedies have been considered drugs since 1897 with the official publication of the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of the United States (HPUS). This is an autonomous body which predates the FDA, and homeopathic medicines have been under separate licensing and regulation since 1938.

Homeopathic remedies manufactured by reputable companies meet HPUS guidelines. These are specific for the quality, purity and manufacturing criteria, legal standards of strength, quality, and purity for each individual homeopathic medicine, as well as combination homeopathic medicines recommended by physicians world wide.

Again, these should be taken under the guidance of a licensed physician or health care provider trained in homeopathy or homotoxicology. Homeopathy is a distinct medical paradigm. Few physicians even realize that, if they ever prescribed sublingual nitroglycerine 1/150 for their patient's angina, they were in effect practicing homeopathy!

This is one of the few original homeopathic medicines that 'crossed-over' to modern allopathic medicine several decades ago. Dana Ullmann's *Everybody's guide to Homeopathy* offers an excellent source of information on this fascinating medical healing system.

The subject is complex, but in brief, homeo-

Is your health supplement... *REALLY* supplementing your health?

Will that homeopathic remedy be right for you?

Do you wonder what are the correct dosages of herbs to take?
Are you taking handfuls of supplements and not getting better?



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pathic medicines are prescribed by a physician according to the specific physical and emotional symptoms, as well as pertinent clinical findings a patient might describe, ie: "diarrhea with greenish foul order, fever, left sided abdominal pain, right sided headache, melancholy attitude, and all my symptoms made worse in damp weather."

The proper homeopathic remedy is next chosen on its unique set of characteristics as they may pertain to treating a given set of symptoms and clinical findings in the individual. Finally, the potency or 'strength' of the remedy is a factor of its dilution. Yes, dilution! Samuel Hahnemann, M.D., discovered and developed the original principles and practice of homeopathy. His original clinical observations in 1785 that hold true to this day are:

1.) *like cures like.* Conventional western medicine considers symptoms to be the result of a disease process and is 'cured' by using a medicine that opposes the symptoms – sometimes by direct suppression, ie: anti inflammatories, and sometimes by indirect route that leads to their removal, ie: antibiotics. According to Hahnemann, the proper remedy for an illness is that substance, which in a healthy person, would produce the same set of symptoms exhibited in the sick person.

2.) The *homeopathic dilution or minimal dose* activates the healing process – higher doses are often toxic. Administered in homeopathic dilution, homeopathic treatment seeks to mobilize the bodies inherent healing powers to eliminate toxic substances contributing to illness, ie: bacteria, viruses, carcinogenic chemicals, and potentially harmful substances of metabolism. Homeopathic remedies never cover up symptoms and they have **NO TOXIC SIDE EFFECTS.**

The minimal dose is made from an initial 100% concentrated form of the natural substance being

made into a remedy. The final dilution in a given series of specific sequential dilutions contain very little, if at all, of the original physical matter left.

Choosing the remedy, its potency, and dosing frequency are beyond the scope of this article – here again the sage advice of a trained health care practitioner is invaluable. **Notable companies are Heel/BHI, the world's largest manufacturer of combination homeopathic remedies, Boiron, Lutyes, and Delisos.**

As Allan Gaby, M.D., once said, "your health should come from the farm not the pharmacy..."

"...And it was given to every man and woman and beast of the field the healing grasses of the earth...."

— Old Testament

To life and good health,
David Zeiger, D.O.

Dr. David Zeiger is board certified family physician in private practice. He specializes in Integrative Medicine treating chronic/acute illness like IBS, Allergies, Women's/Men's health issues, Thyroid-Adrenal Syndrome, Hypertension, CFIDS/Fibromyalgia, Asthma, Diabetes, and Neuromuscular pain management.

He uses acupuncture, functional nutritional medicine, osteopathic manipulation, homeopathy, Chinese herbal medicine, neural therapy and ligament regeneration injection therapy.

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