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Considerations for the Use of Dietary or Herbal Supplements

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Over the Counter



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Considerations for the Use of Dietary or Herbal Supplements

By Samantha Morrison, PharmD Candidate and Mary Menezes, Pharm D

In an effort to stay healthy, are you considering the use of an herbal or dietary supplement? These supplements, which come in a variety of forms that include tablets, capsules, powders, oils, drinks, and energy bars, contain vitamins, minerals, herbals or botanicals, amino acids, and enzymes among other ingredients that are purportedly used to compliment our diet. Some popular supplements include vitamins D & E, minerals such as calcium and iron, and herbs like Echinacea and garlic. There are also a number of specialty products like glucosamine, probiotics and fish oil that are used as alternative treatments for conditions like arthritis, digestive health and to help prevent heart disease and stroke.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has many resources that are available to the public to help make better decisions regarding the safe use of herbal and dietary supplements. One resource entitled *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely*, which is available from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (an institute within NIH), is a fact sheet that discusses the basics of complementary and alternative medicine. Some of the key points from this fact sheet include:

The US Food and Drug Administration regulates dietary supplements to an extent under the *Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994*. However, these regulations are different and less strict than those for prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

Research has confirmed health benefits of certain supplements but not all that are commercially available.

- To safely use supplements, read and follow the label instructions. Also recognize that “natural” does not always mean “safe.” Be aware that an herbal supplement may contain dozens of different ingredients, and in some instances all the ingredients may not be known.
- Some dietary supplements may interact with medications or pose health risks if you have medical problems or are going to have surgery. Further, most supplements have not been tested in pregnant women, nursing mothers, or children.
- Tell your healthcare providers about any complementary health approaches you use, including supplement use. Giving them a full picture of what you do to manage your health will help ensure that you are given the best and safest care possible.

Another resource published by the NIH is entitled *Herbs at a Glance*. This resource is a series of brief fact sheets that provides: common herbal names; a description of the science behind them; precautions and potential side effects, as well as other pertinent information. This information can be downloaded to a web-enabled device (e.g. Nook, iPad, or Kindle) or as individual files at <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/herbsataglance.htm>. For more information about herbal or dietary supplements visit <http://nccam.nih.gov> or for questions ask your pharmacist or doctor. ☞

HEALTH

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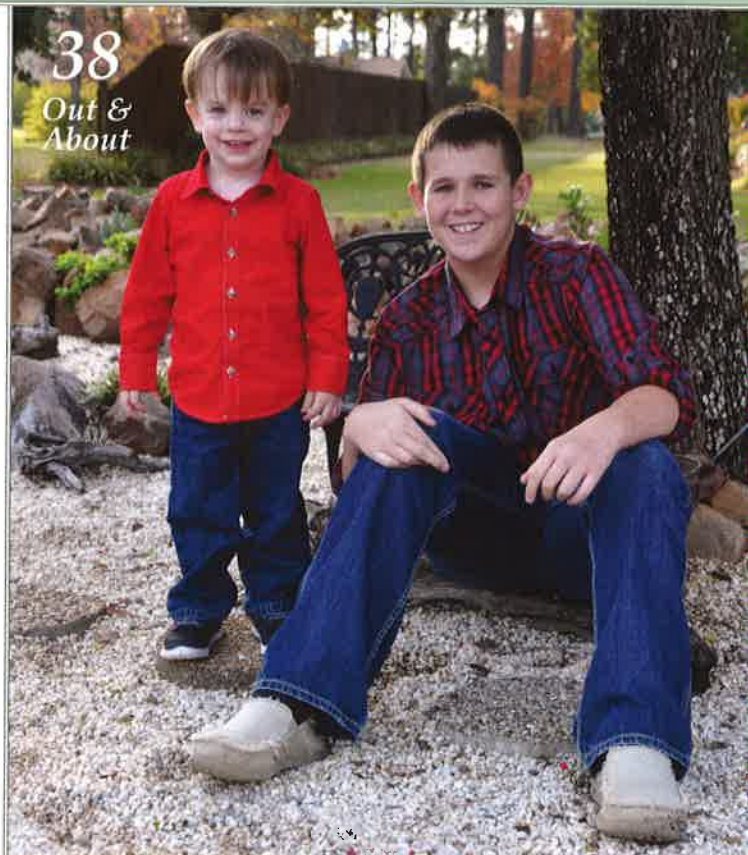
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— NORMAN VINCENT PEALE



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