Dietary Supplement Myths

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Take a quick trip to the grocery store or pharmacy, and you’ll discover that dietary supplements—including vitamins, minerals or herbs—are big business. But if you eat a balanced diet, these pills, powders and liquid add-ons are unnecessary. Here are 10 common myths about them:

1. Dietary supplements are regulated by the FDA, just like food and medicine. In actuality, the FDA does not regulate supplements as tightly as they control food and drugs.

2. Supplements must be proved safe and effective before they can be sold. In fact, supplement manufacturers are not required to do this. The FDA must prove a product is unsafe before pulling it from the market.

3. A higher price indicates better quality. In reality, generic products are generally just as good as more expensive ones.

4. Products with one of these labels are better-quality supplements: high potency, pharmacy grade or prescription strength. There is actually no legal definition for these terms.

5. Dietary supplements are intended to diagnose, treat, prevent or cure diseases. To avoid being classified as a drug, the supplement cannot be used for any of these reasons.

6. Because they are sold over the counter, supplements are harmless. They can produce negative side effects when combined with other supplements or prescription medications.

7. Natural products are better for you than synthetic products. There is no legal definition of the word “natural” regarding supplements.

8. Pregnant and nursing women can safely take dietary supplements. Pregnant and nursing women should be cautious about using supplements, especially herbal products, which may cross the placenta or transfer to breast milk.

9. The amounts of active ingredients in supplements must be disclosed to consumers. While active ingredients need to be listed, the amounts are often not included.

10. More is better: When selecting a multivitamin, look for one that has as much of each vitamin or mineral as possible. Too much is not a good thing. Look for a multivitamin with vitamins and minerals as close to 100 percent of daily value (%DV) as possible.

Before taking a dietary supplement, consult your physician or healthcare provider.