

15: CONSUMER HEALTH AND AGING



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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

15: Consumer Health and Aging

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15.1: Finding Reliable Health Information

Millions of consumers get health information from magazines, TV or the Internet. Some of the information is reliable and up to date; some is not. How can you tell the good from the bad?

First, consider the source. If you use the Web, look for an “about us” page. Check to see who runs the site: Is it a branch of the government, a university, a health organization, a hospital or a business? Focus on quality. Does the site have an editorial board? Is the information reviewed before it is posted? Be skeptical. Things that sound too good to be true often are. You want current, unbiased information based on [research](#).

Consider the source—Use recognized authorities

Know who is responsible for the content.

- Look for an “about us” page. Check to see who runs the site: is it a branch of the Federal Government, a non-profit institution, a professional organization, a health system, a commercial organization or an individual.
- There is a big difference between a site that says, “I developed this site after my heart attack” and one that says, “This page on heart attack was developed by health professionals at the American Heart Association.”
- Web sites should have a way to contact the organization or webmaster. If the site provides no contact information, or if you can’t easily find out who runs the site, use caution.

Focus on quality—All Web sites are not created equal

Does the site have an editorial board? Is the information reviewed before it is posted?

- This information is often on the “about us” page, or it may be under the organization’s mission statement, or part of the annual report.
- See if the board members are experts in the subject of the site. For example, a site on osteoporosis whose medical advisory board is composed of attorneys and accountants is not medically authoritative.
- Look for a description of the process of selecting or approving information on the site. It is usually in the “about us” section and may be called “editorial policy” or “selection policy” or “review policy.”
- Sometimes the site will have information “about our writers” or “about our authors” instead of an editorial policy. Review this section to find out who has written the information.

Be a cyberskeptic—Quackery abounds on the Web

Does the site make health claims that seem too good to be true? Does the information use deliberately obscure, “scientific” sounding language? Does it promise quick, dramatic, miraculous results? Is this the only site making these claims?

- Beware of claims that one remedy will cure a variety of illnesses, that it is a “breakthrough,” or that it relies on a “secret ingredient.”
- Use caution if the site uses a sensational writing style (lots of exclamation points, for example.)
- A health Web site for consumers should use simple language, not technical jargon.
- Get a second opinion! Check more than one site.

YouTube: Evaluating Online Sources of Health Information (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=augrvuHd1OM>)

Look for the evidence—Rely on medical research, not opinion

Does the site identify the author? Does it rely on testimonials?

- Look for the author of the information, either an individual or an organization. Good examples are “Written by Jane Smith, R.N.,” or “Copyright 2013, American Cancer Society.”
- If there are case histories or testimonials on the Web site, look for contact information such as an email address or telephone number. If the testimonials are anonymous or hard to track down (“Jane from California”), use caution.

Check for currency—Look for the latest information

Is the information current?

- Look for dates on documents. A document on coping with the loss of a loved one doesn't need to be current, but a document on the latest treatment of AIDS needs to be current.
- Click on a few links on the site. If there are a lot of broken links, the site may not be kept up-to-date.

Beware of bias—What is the purpose? Who is providing the funding?

Who pays for the site?

- Check to see if the site is supported by public funds, donations or by commercial advertising.
- Advertisements should be labeled. They should say “Advertisement” or “From our Sponsor.”
- Look at a page on the site, and see if it is clear when content is coming from a non-commercial source and when an advertiser provides it. For example, if a page about treatment of depression recommends one drug by name, see if you can tell if the company that manufactures the drug provides that information. If it does, you should consult other sources to see what they say about the same drug.

Protect your privacy—Health information should be confidential

Does the site have a privacy policy and tell you what information they collect?

- There should be a link saying “Privacy” or “Privacy Policy.” Read the privacy policy to see if your privacy is really being protected. For example, if the site says “We share information with companies that can provide you with useful products,” then your information isn't private.
- If there is a registration form, notice what types of questions you must answer before you can view content. If you must provide personal information (such as name, address, date of birth, gender, mother's maiden name, credit card number) you should refer to their privacy policy to see what they can do with your information.

Consult with your health professional—Patient/provider partnerships lead to the best medical decisions.

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15.2: Health Fraud

6 Tip-offs to Rip-offs: Don't Fall for Health Fraud Scams

Bogus product! Danger! Health fraud alert!

You'll never see these warnings on health products, but that's what you ought to be thinking when you see claims like "miracle cure," "revolutionary scientific breakthrough," or "alternative to drugs or surgery."

Health fraud scams have been around for hundreds of years. The snake oil salesmen of old have morphed into the deceptive, high-tech marketers of today. They prey on people's desires for easy solutions to difficult health problems—from losing weight to curing serious diseases like cancer.

According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a health product is fraudulent if it is deceptively promoted as being effective against a disease or health condition but has not been scientifically proven safe and effective for that purpose.

Scammers promote their products through newspapers, magazines, TV infomercials and cyberspace. You can find health fraud scams in retail stores and on countless websites, in popup ads and spam, and on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.



YouTube: Health Fraud Scams (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsPlwKbGxE8>)

Not Worth the Risk

Health fraud scams can do more than waste your money. They can cause serious injury or even death, says Gary Coody, R.Ph., FDA's national health fraud coordinator. "Using unproven treatments can delay getting a potentially life-saving diagnosis and medication that actually works. Also, fraudulent products sometimes contain hidden drug ingredients that can be harmful when unknowingly taken by consumers."

Fraudulent products often make claims related to:

- weight loss
- sexual performance
- memory loss
- serious diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and Alzheimer's.

A Pervasive Problem

Fraudulent products not only won't work—they could cause serious injury. In the past few years, FDA laboratories have found more than 100 weight-loss products, illegally marketed as dietary supplements, that contained sibutramine, the active ingredient in the prescription weight-loss drug Meridia. In 2010, Meridia was withdrawn from the U.S. market after studies showed that it was associated with an increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Fraudulent products marketed as drugs or dietary supplements are not the only health scams on the market. FDA found a fraudulent and expensive light therapy device with cure-all claims to treat fungal meningitis, Alzheimer's, skin cancer, concussions and many other unrelated diseases. Generally, making health claims about a medical device without FDA clearance or approval of the device is illegal.

“Health fraud is a pervasive problem,” says Coody, “especially when scammers sell online. It’s difficult to track down the responsible parties. When we do find them and tell them their products are illegal, some will shut down their website. Unfortunately, however, these same products may reappear later on a different website, and sometimes may reappear with a different name.”

Health Fraud Tip-Offs

FDA offers some tip-offs to help you identify rip-offs.

- **One product does it all.** Be suspicious of products that claim to cure a wide range of diseases. A New York firm claimed its products marketed as dietary supplements could treat or cure senile dementia, brain atrophy, atherosclerosis, kidney dysfunction, gangrene, depression, osteoarthritis, dysuria, and lung, cervical and prostate cancer. In October 2012, at FDA’s request, U.S. marshals seized these products.
- **Personal testimonials.** Success stories, such as, “It cured my diabetes” or “My tumors are gone,” are easy to make up and are not a substitute for scientific evidence.
- **Quick fixes.** Few diseases or conditions can be treated quickly, even with legitimate products. Beware of language such as, “Lose 30 pounds in 30 days” or “eliminates skin cancer in days.”
- **“All natural.”** Some plants found in nature (such as poisonous mushrooms) can kill when consumed. Moreover, FDA has found numerous products promoted as “all natural” but that contain hidden and dangerously high doses of prescription drug ingredients or even untested active artificial ingredients.
- **“Miracle cure.”** Alarms should go off when you see this claim or others like it such as, “new discovery,” “scientific breakthrough” or “secret ingredient.” If a real cure for a serious disease were discovered, it would be widely reported through the media and prescribed by health professionals—not buried in print ads, TV infomercials or on Internet sites.
- **Conspiracy theories.** Claims like “The pharmaceutical industry and the government are working together to hide information about a miracle cure” are always untrue and unfounded. These statements are used to distract consumers from the obvious, common-sense questions about the so-called miracle cure.

Even with these tips, fraudulent health products are not always easy to spot. If you’re tempted to buy an unproven product or one with questionable claims, check with your doctor or other health care professional first.

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15.3: Quick Tips for Evaluating Health Websites

Content on the Internet is unregulated; anyone can publish anything on the Internet. There is sound medical information on the Internet along with dangerous information. You need to be able to tell the difference.

Ask yourself the following:

- Why did the person create the page?
- What's in it for them?
- Are they trying to sell me something?

Criteria for evaluating information from the web:

Accuracy

- Is the information based on sound medical research? Can the information on the web page be verified by another source?
- Are the sources cited reliable?
- Are there grammatical and spelling errors?
- Are there footnotes, bibliographies, or references so that you can verify the information? Are these reliable? (a citation to Parade magazine does not have the same weight as an article from JAMA)

Authority

- Who published the page? What are the person's credentials? What do you know about them?
- Is the person backed by a known organization? (the American Association for Cancer Therapy may be a made-up name for something operating out of someone's basement.)
- Is the person affiliated with a university? If so, is the person a student or a faculty member?
- Can you easily find contact information on the web page? Check the "about us" link, usually found at the beginning or the end of a webpage. What does the "About Us" section tell you about the purpose of the organization? Can you find a physical location for the organization? Or is the only way to contact the organization through a webform?
- What is the domain name? (.edu, .gov) Is it a personal page or supported by the organization? The tilde (~) means that the site is a personal page (compare an address like med.harvard.edu/~jsmith/headache to med.harvard.edu/neurology/headache)

Bias/Objectivity

- Is the information showing just one point of view?
- What kind of institution sponsored the webpage? A pharmaceutical company? A non-profit organization?
- Is advertising clearly marked?
- Can you tell if the information you are reading is advertisement?
- Do the graphics, fonts, and verbiage play upon emotions? Beware of CAPITAL LETTERS, EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!! Or words like MIRACLE CURE!!!
- Is the author using data improperly to promote a position or a product?

Currency/Timeliness

- Is there a date on the page?
- When was the page last updated?
- Do the links work?
- Has there been more recent research on the subject? Many medical treatments change with the publication of new studies. What was published a year ago may be outdated now.

Coverage

- Is the information complete?
- Are there sources given for additional information?

Additional Resources

- MedlinePlus Guide to Healthy Web Surfing: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthywebsurfing.html>
- [Trust It or Trash It?](#) (evaluation tool)
- [Trust It or Trash It?](#) (printer-friendly handout)

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15.4: Complementary and Integrative Health



Complementary, Alternative, or Integrative Health: What's In a Name?

We've all seen the words “complementary,” “alternative,” and “integrative,” but what do they really mean?

Note: Also has been referred to as “complementary and alternative medicine,” or “CAM” as an abbreviation.

Complementary Versus Alternative

Many Americans—more than 30 percent of adults and about 12 percent of children—use health care approaches developed outside of mainstream Western, or conventional, medicine. When describing these approaches, people often use “alternative” and “complementary” interchangeably, but the two terms refer to different concepts:

- If a non-mainstream practice is used together with conventional medicine, it's considered “complementary.”
- If a non-mainstream practice is used in place of conventional medicine, it's considered “alternative.”

True alternative medicine is uncommon. Most people who use non-mainstream approaches use them along with conventional treatments.

Integrative Medicine

There are many definitions of “integrative” health care, but all involve bringing conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way. The use of integrative approaches to health and wellness has grown within care settings across the United States. Researchers are currently exploring the potential benefits of integrative health in a variety of situations, including pain management for military personnel and veterans, relief of symptoms in cancer patients and survivors, and programs to promote healthy behaviors.

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15.5: Types of Complementary Health Approaches

Most complementary health approaches fall into one of two subgroups—natural products or mind and body practices.

To learn more about specific products, practices, and approaches, click on each underlined item below.

Natural Products

This group includes a variety of products, such as [herbs](#) (also known as botanicals), vitamins and minerals, and [probiotics](#). They are widely marketed, readily available to consumers, and often sold as dietary supplements.

According to the 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), which included a comprehensive survey on the use of complementary health approaches by Americans, 17.7 percent of American adults had used a dietary supplement other than vitamins and minerals in the past year. These products were the most popular complementary health approach in the survey. The most commonly used natural product was fish oil.

Researchers have done large, rigorous studies on a few natural products, but the results often showed that the products didn't work. Research on others is in progress. While there are indications that some may be helpful, more needs to be learned about the effects of these products in the human body and about their safety and potential interactions with medicines and other natural products.

Mind and Body Practices

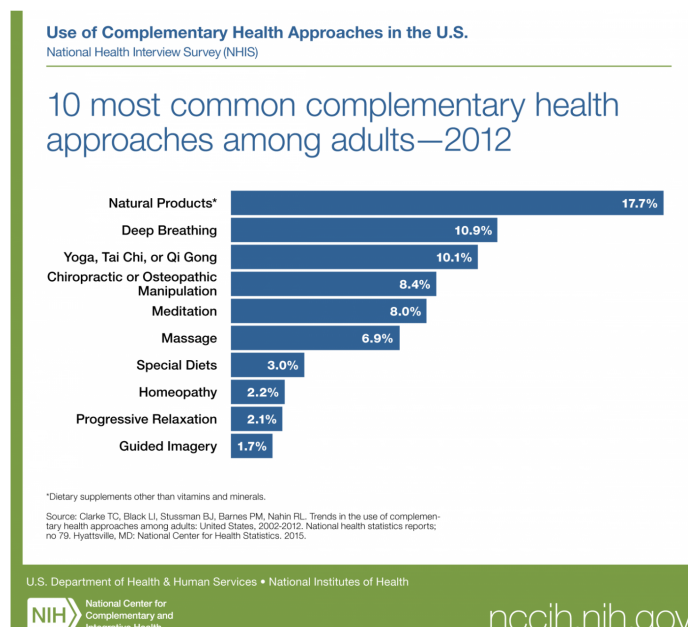
Mind and body practices include a large and diverse group of procedures or techniques administered or taught by a trained practitioner or teacher. The 2012 NHIS showed that [yoga](#), [chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation](#), [meditation](#), and [massage therapy](#) are among the most popular mind and body practices used by adults. The popularity of yoga has grown dramatically in recent years, with almost twice as many U.S. adults practicing yoga in 2012 as in 2002.

Other mind and body practices include [acupuncture](#), [relaxation techniques](#) (such as breathing exercises, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation), [tai chi](#), qi gong, healing touch, hypnotherapy, and movement therapies (such as Feldenkrais method, Alexander technique, Pilates, Rolfing Structural Integration, and Trager psychophysical integration).

The amount of research on mind and body approaches varies widely depending on the practice. For example, researchers have done many studies on acupuncture, yoga, spinal manipulation, and meditation, but there have been fewer studies on some other practices.

Other Complementary Health Approaches

The two broad areas discussed above—natural products and mind and body practices—capture most complementary health approaches. However, some approaches may not neatly fit into either of these groups—for example, the practices of traditional healers, [Ayurvedic medicine](#), [traditional Chinese medicine](#), [homeopathy](#), and [naturopathy](#).



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15.6: Dietary Supplements

Like many Americans, you may take dietary supplements in an effort to stay healthy. With so many dietary supplements available and so many claims made about their health benefits, how can you decide whether a supplement is safe or useful? This fact sheet provides a general overview of dietary supplements, discusses safety considerations, and suggests sources for additional information.

Federal Regulation of Dietary Supplements

The Federal Government regulates dietary supplements through the FDA. The regulations for dietary supplements are not the same as those for prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

- Manufacturers of dietary supplements are responsible for ensuring that their products are safe and that the label information is truthful and not misleading. However, a manufacturer of a dietary supplement does not have to provide the FDA with data that demonstrate the safety of the product before it is marketed.¹ In contrast, manufacturers of drugs have to provide the FDA with evidence that their products are both safe and effective before the drugs can be sold.
- Manufacturers may make three types of claims for their dietary supplements: health claims, structure/function claims, and nutrient content claims. Some of these claims describe the link between a food substance and a disease or health-related condition; the intended benefits of using the product; or the amount of a nutrient or dietary substance in a product. Different requirements apply to each type of claim. If a dietary supplement manufacturer makes a claim about a product's effects, the manufacturer must have data to support the claim. Claims about how a supplement affects the structure or function of the body must be followed by the words "This statement has not been evaluated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease."
- Manufacturers must follow "current good manufacturing practices" for dietary supplements to ensure that these products are processed, labeled, and packaged consistently and meet quality standards.
- Once a dietary supplement is on the market, the FDA evaluates safety by doing research and keeping track of any side effects reported by consumers, health care providers, and supplement companies. If the FDA finds a product to be unsafe, it can take action against the manufacturer and/or distributor, and may issue a warning or require that the product be removed from the marketplace.

Sources of Science-Based Information

It's important to look for reliable sources of information on dietary supplements so you can evaluate the claims that are made about them. The most reliable information on dietary supplements is based on the results of rigorous scientific testing.

To get reliable information on a particular dietary supplement:

- Ask your health care providers. Even if they don't know about a specific dietary supplement, they may be able to access the latest medical guidance about its uses and risks.
- Look for scientific research findings on the dietary supplement. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS), as well as other Federal agencies, have free publications, clearinghouses, and information on their Web sites.

Safety Considerations

If you're thinking about or currently using a dietary supplement, here are some points to keep in mind.

- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.
- It's especially important to talk to your health care providers if you:
 - Take any medications (whether prescription or over-the-counter). Some dietary supplements have been found to interact with medications. For example, the herbal supplement St. John's wort interacts with many medications, making them less effective.
 - Are thinking about replacing your regular medication with one or more dietary supplements.
 - Expect to have surgery. Certain dietary supplements may increase the risk of bleeding or affect the response to anesthesia.
 - Are pregnant, nursing a baby, attempting to become pregnant, or considering giving a child a dietary supplement. Most dietary supplements have not been tested in pregnant women, nursing mothers, or children.

- Have any medical conditions. Some dietary supplements may harm you if you have particular medical conditions. For example, by taking supplements that contain iron, people with hemochromatosis, a hereditary disease in which too much iron accumulates in the body, could further increase their iron levels and therefore their risk of complications such as liver disease.
- If you're taking a dietary supplement, follow the label instructions. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions, particularly about the best dosage for you to take. If you experience any side effects that concern you, stop taking the dietary supplement, and contact your health care provider. You can report serious problems suspected with dietary supplements to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health through the Safety Reporting Portal.
- Keep in mind that although many dietary supplements (and some prescription drugs) come from natural sources, “natural” does not always mean “safe.” For example, the herbs comfrey and kava can cause serious harm to the liver. Also, a manufacturer’s use of the term “standardized” (or “verified” or “certified”) does not necessarily guarantee product quality or consistency.
- Be aware that an herbal supplement may contain dozens of compounds and that all of its ingredients may not be known. Researchers are studying many of these products in an effort to identify what ingredients may be active and understand their effects in the body. Also consider the possibility that what’s on the label may not be what’s in the bottle. Analyses of dietary supplements sometimes find differences between labeled and actual ingredients. For example:
 - An herbal supplement may not contain the correct plant species.
 - The amounts of the ingredients may be lower or higher than the label states. That means you may be taking less—or more—of the dietary supplement than you realize.
 - The dietary supplement may be contaminated with other herbs, pesticides, or metals, or even adulterated with unlabeled, illegal ingredients such as prescription drugs.

Key Points about Supplements

- Dietary supplements contain a variety of ingredients, such as vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and herbs or other botanicals. Research has confirmed health benefits of some dietary supplements but not others.
- To use dietary supplements safely, read and follow the label instructions, and recognize that “natural” does not always mean “safe.” Be aware that an herbal supplement may contain dozens of compounds and that all of its ingredients may not be known.
- Some dietary supplements may interact with medications or pose risks if you have medical problems or are going to have surgery. Most dietary supplements have not been tested in pregnant women, nursing mothers, or children.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates dietary supplements, but the regulations for dietary supplements are different and less strict than those for prescription or over-the-counter drugs.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

For current information from the Federal Government on the safety of particular dietary supplements, check the “[Dietary Supplement Alerts and Safety Information](#)” section of the [FDA Web site](#) or the “[Alerts and Advisories](#)” section of the [NCCIH Web site](#).

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15.7: Aging

Every year we get one year older chronologically, does this mean we also get one year older biologically? Our biological age is the age of our body and this is not dependent on our chronological age. You can be a 30 year old who is very healthy and has a biological age closer to 20 year old, or you can be a 30 year old who lives an unhealthy lifestyle and has a biological age closer to 40. Our biological age is highly influenced by the lifestyle choices we make.

The good news is that Americans are living longer lives, but the bad news is that the increase in our older population brings an increase in chronic diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, and dementia. It is estimated that 80% of older adults have a chronic health condition. With so many older adults having chronic health conditions we know there will continue to be an increased need for caregivers. This creates a potential problem because although our older population is growing, or birth rates are declining which may reduce the amount of people to serve as caretakers.

Aging Data

- 10,000 people each day turn 65, this will continue through 2030
- Between 2012 and 2050, the number of adults age 65 and older will nearly double in the US, reaching 84 million
 - By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be age 65 or older
- In 2033, the number of adults age 65 and older will outnumber people younger than 18 for the first time in the US
- The number of people age 85 and older will roughly triple in the U.S. between 2012 and 2050
- By 2050, more than 18 million Americans will be age 85 or older
- By 2050, more than 439,000 Americans will be age 100 or older
- 80% of older adults, aged 60 and older, have at least one chronic condition
- 1 in 3 older adults 65+ have Activities of Daily Living (ADL) limitations (managing money, shopping, telephone use, travel in community, housekeeping, preparing meals, and taking medications correctly)

Guiding Model for Healthy Aging

The CDC recommends a three prong approach to healthy aging which includes:

1. Promote health, prevent injury, and manage chronic conditions
2. Optimize physical, cognitive, and mental health
3. Facilitate social engagement

Challenges of Aging

There are many challenges associated with aging. Here is a list of common challenges.

[Advance Care Planning \(ACP\)](#)

[Alzheimer's disease](#)

[Caregiving](#)

[Arthritis](#)

[Hearing loss](#)

[Motor-vehicle safety](#)

[Osteoporosis](#)

[Vision loss](#)

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