Dietary Supplements: What you need to know

What Is a Supplement?
- A product taken by mouth that contains a "dietary ingredient"
- Includes: vitamins, herbs, vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals (plants), amino acids, and substances such as enzymes, organ tissues, glandulars, and metabolites; can also be extracts or concentrates
- Available in many forms such as tablets, capsules, softgels, gelcaps, liquids, or powders, bars

Who Regulates Supplements?
Dietary supplements are regulated as foods, not drugs, despite the drug-like action of many products. Supplements are not reviewed by the government before they are marketed; however, the FDA must investigate reports of false and misleading product information and also adverse reactions voluntarily reported by manufacturers, or consumers.

What Should You Consider Before Taking a Supplement?
- Consider your entire diet; supplements are meant to improve your daily diet, not to be the sole source of any given nutrient in your diet.
- Check with your doctor and healthcare team before starting a new supplement.
- Supplements can interact with your over-the-counter and prescribed medications and can have serious effects during surgery.
- You can always contact the manufacturer/distributor for more information about the specific product.

False Assumptions To Be Aware Of:
- If a product is "natural" it is healthful and safe. "Natural" does NOT equal "Safe." All mushrooms are "natural," but some have enough toxins to kill.
- If a product does not have cautionary information on the label, it is safe. The manufacturer is only responsible for the label to be true and not misleading; they are not required to include all warnings and potential adverse effects.
- If a product is unsafe and is recalled, it will be immediately and completely removed from the marketplace. A dietary supplement product recall is voluntary and does not necessarily remove all harmful products from the marketplace.

Adverse Effects From Supplements Should Be Reported To MedWatch:
- Call: 1.800.FDA.1088
- Fax: 1.800.FDA.0178
- Online: www.fda.gov/medwatch/how.htm
For helpful information on specific dietary supplements and other important information check out these helpful websites:

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Complementary/Integrative Medicine Education Resources
www.mdanderson.org/cimer

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine
Herbs at a Glance
www.nccam.nih.gov/health/herbsataglance.htm

Caring4Cancer
Cancer Knowledge & Support
www.caring4cancer.com

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center
About Herbs, Botanicals & Other Products
www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm

Also, check our our tips for evaluating online resources for nutritional information at www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/cancer-patients/nutrition/resources/online.cfm