

The Supplement Safety Checklist

How to vet any dietary supplement
in 10 minutes - before you spend a dime

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Why you need this checklist

The supplement industry is worth over 60 billion dollars a year - and unlike prescription drugs, supplements do not need FDA approval before they reach the shelf. The FDA only steps in after a product is shown to be unsafe or mislabeled. That means the burden of vetting a product falls almost entirely on you, the buyer.

Independent testing regularly finds products that contain less active ingredient than the label claims, undisclosed fillers, or doses far below anything used in clinical research. Others are perfectly legitimate. The problem is telling them apart from marketing pages that all look equally convincing.

This checklist gives you 10 quick checks - most take a minute or two - that filter out the vast majority of low-quality products. Print it, keep it on your phone, and run through it before any purchase.

This guide is for information only and is not medical advice. Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting a supplement, especially if you take medication, are pregnant or nursing, or have a medical condition.

The 10-point safety checklist

- ☐ **1. Read the label - and distrust 'proprietary blends'**
A quality label lists every ingredient with its exact dose. A 'proprietary blend' only gives you the total weight of a mix, which lets a company sprinkle in trace amounts of the expensive ingredients you are actually paying for. If the key actives are hidden inside a blend, treat it as a red flag.
- ☐ **2. Compare doses with clinical research**
An ingredient can be legitimate while the dose is useless. Search the ingredient name plus 'clinical trial dose' (or check examine.com) and compare. Example: most berberine studies use 900-1500 mg per day - a product with 100 mg is decorative.
- ☐ **3. Look for third-party testing**
Seals from USP, NSF International, or ConsumerLab mean an independent lab verified that the bottle contains what the label says, without dangerous contaminants. Absence of a seal is not proof of fraud - testing is expensive - but the presence of one is the strongest quality signal available.
- ☐ **4. Vet the manufacturer**
Look for a physical address, a US or EU manufacturing location, and a claim of GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) certification. A brand with no company name, no address, and a website registered last month is not a brand - it is a landing page.
- ☐ **5. Check drug interactions**
Natural does not mean inert. St. John's Wort weakens birth control and antidepressants; vitamin K interferes with blood thinners; high-dose green tea extract can stress the liver. Check every ingredient against your medications on a reputable interaction checker, or ask your pharmacist - it is free.
- ☐ **6. Refuse miracle language**
By law, supplements cannot claim to treat, cure, or prevent disease. Words like 'cures diabetes', 'melts fat overnight', 'reverses hearing loss' are not just hype - they are the signature of sellers who ignore the law. Serious brands talk about 'support' and cite studies; scammers promise transformations.
- ☐ **7. Search the FDA warning and recall databases**
Two minutes on fda.gov: search the brand in the Warning Letters database and in the recall list (Tainted Supplements). Weight-loss, sexual-enhancement, and muscle products are the categories most often found spiked with actual undeclared drugs.
- ☐ **8. Read reviews like an investigator**
Ignore star averages. Read the 2- and 3-star reviews - they are usually written by real customers with real observations. Red flags in reviews: dozens of 5-star reviews posted the same week, identical phrasing, or reviews that describe a different product.
- ☐ **9. Evaluate the refund policy - then verify it**
A 60- or 90-day money-back guarantee is standard for reputable direct-to-consumer brands. Before buying, find the actual refund procedure: is there a real support email or phone number? Search '[brand] refund experience' to see whether customers actually got their money back.



10. Talk to your doctor first

Especially if you are pregnant or nursing, take any prescription medication, have liver or kidney disease, or are preparing for surgery. Bring the label with you - a photo is enough. One honest conversation beats a hundred online reviews.

Instant red flags - walk away if you see these

- ✗ The product claims to cure, reverse, or treat a disease.
- ✗ Key ingredients are hidden in a 'proprietary blend' with no doses.
- ✗ The 'clinical proof' is a study about an ingredient, presented as a study about the product.
- ✗ Fake urgency: 'only 3 bottles left', countdown timers that reset when you reload.
- ✗ The seller's page imitates a news site or uses fake celebrity endorsements.
- ✗ No company name, physical address, or reachable customer support.
- ✗ The product is sold only through affiliate links, never in any retail channel.
- ✗ Testimonials show 'results' that would be remarkable for a prescription drug.
- ✗ The brand appeared recently but claims '50,000 satisfied customers'.
- ✗ Pressure to buy 6 bottles because 'real results take 6 months'.

Special caution: your liver

The liver processes almost everything you swallow. Case reports of supplement-induced liver injury most often involve high-dose green tea extract (EGCG above ~800 mg/day), anabolic 'muscle' blends, high-dose niacin, and multi-ingredient weight-loss stacks. Warning signs while taking any supplement: unusual fatigue, dark urine, yellowing skin or eyes, pain under the right ribs. Stop the product and see a doctor if any of these appear.

Quick reference: common ingredients and studied doses

Typical daily doses used in published human research. If a product contains dramatically less, it is unlikely to do anything; dramatically more is not automatically better - or safe.

Berberine (blood sugar)	900-1,500 mg, split into 2-3 doses
Green tea extract / EGCG (metabolism)	300-500 mg EGCG; stay under ~800 mg for liver safety
Caffeine (energy, fat oxidation)	100-400 mg; less if sensitive
Glucosamine sulfate (joints)	1,500 mg
Chondroitin (joints)	800-1,200 mg
Curcumin / turmeric extract (inflammation)	500-1,000 mg with piperine or a lipid form
Lutein + zeaxanthin (eyes)	10-20 mg lutein + 2-4 mg zeaxanthin
Melatonin (sleep)	0.5-5 mg, 30-60 min before bed
Saw palmetto (prostate)	320 mg standardized extract
Probiotics (gut)	1-10 billion CFU of identified strains (strain code on label)
Biotin (hair, nails)	30 mcg covers needs; mega-doses distort lab tests
Omega-3 EPA+DHA (heart)	1,000-2,000 mg combined EPA+DHA

About LiveWell Magazine

LiveWell Magazine publishes independent, research-based reviews of health and wellness products. We check every product in this guide's spirit: ingredients, doses, evidence, manufacturer, and refund policy. Read our latest reviews at livewellmagazine.org.

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