

Avoiding

Unsafe Supplements

Unlike drugs, supplements such as vitamins and herbs don't have to be tested and proved safe and effective before they are sold to the public. This is because supplements don't require approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

In addition:

- Warnings about side effects, drug interactions or people who shouldn't take the product aren't required on labels and in ads.
- Manufacturers don't have to notify the FDA when they receive reports of side effects.
- What goes into supplements is not regulated, so you don't always know exactly what you're getting.

The following supplements may cause serious problems or drug interactions:

- **Aristolochic acid:** Found in some traditional Chinese medicines. Can cause cancer or kidney damage.
- **Chaparral, Comfrey, Kava and Germander:** Can cause liver damage.
- **Ephedra (Ma huang):** Can cause high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack and death. Banned by the FDA.
- **Tiratricol:** Found in some weight-loss supplements. Can cause stroke and heart attack.
- **Androstenedione (Andro):** Found in some bodybuilding

supplements. Similar side effects to steroids (changes in sex organs, increased cancer risk).

- **St. John's wort and garlic supplements:** Can reduce the effectiveness of certain HIV drugs.

Many HIV+ people take supplements to get extra nutrients or help deal with HIV-related side effects. But before taking anything, talk to your doctor and an HIV-knowledgeable dietician about what supplements to take and possible side effects or interactions with your HIV drugs.

More information:

FDA: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-warn.html

The Natural Pharmacist: www.tnp.com/tnp-consumer.asp

Center for Complementary Medicine: <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/>

Memorial Sloan-Kettering: www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm 

Written by Positive Words staff writer.

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