

# Understanding supplements, vitamins, and herbs

Taking supplements like vitamins and herbs can be helpful for people who need to add certain nutrients to their diet. However, it's important to talk to your care team before taking supplements because they can be unsafe if you have chronic kidney disease (CKD).

## Types of supplements

- Vitamin supplements: pills, liquids, or powders that contain vitamins or minerals to add to your diet. Vitamins are different from medications, which are used to treat or cure diseases.
- Herbal supplements: products made from plants that may be taken to improve your health. They may come in various forms, such as tablets, capsules, powders, teas, extracts, or fresh or dried plants.

## Supplements and your health

Supplements can harm your kidneys, change how your medications work, and cause unwanted side effects. This can be dangerous if you are taking transplant medications or blood thinners. For example:

- St. John's Wort, echinacea, ginkgo, and ginseng can affect your prescription medications.
- Licorice root can raise your blood pressure.
- Dandelion, milkweed, stinging nettle (leaf), and Siberian ginseng can increase your potassium levels.

## Approval for supplements

Any prescription medications you take need to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA does not have to approve supplements before they are sold to the public. This is why it's important to check with your care team before taking any supplements.

## Protein supplements

Protein supplements for weight loss, body building, or "energy boosts" should be avoided if you have CKD. High-protein diets can add to CKD progression.

Your healthcare team will make sure you are meeting your protein needs and make recommendations if they feel you need to add supplements.



### We're here to help

Be sure to always check with your care team before taking herbs or supplements and reach out if you have questions.