

## VITAMIN, HERBAL, MINERAL AND NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS

Herbal products and naturally derived substances have been used worldwide for thousands of years as parts of medical treatment. Interest in such products has been increasing in the recent past, particularly in Western medicine where less history and knowledge of the use of these substances exists. In fact, many prescription medications have been derived from plants and naturally occurring substances. The National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is the lead U.S. agency seeking to increase scientific knowledge about and conduct clinical trials of supplements in the U.S. However, reliable, placebo-controlled studies in the use of such agents are relatively few compared to those for prescription medications. Very few of the scientifically supportable studies of supplements have included children as subjects, therefore providing minimal information about safety, efficacy, and appropriate dosing in children. Little is known about potential side effects and interactions with prescription and over the counter (OTC) medications. Concern also exists about the manner and degree of federal regulation of supplements.

The US federal government regulates supplements through the FDA. However, they are regulated as food and not as medicine. As a result of the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, manufacturers of supplements do not have to prove efficacy or safety prior to marketing them. Manufacturers also do not have to prove supplement quality, e.g. proving the supplement contains the correct ingredient, the correct amount or is free from contamination and allergens.

Due to significant current limitations in scientific knowledge about supplements, concerns about the degree of federal regulation and quality control of supplements, and the special requirements and characteristics of children placed in DCF facilities or under guardianship of DCF, **the use of these products in such children is not recommended.** Currently supplements are not a part of the DCF formulary. However, if a supplement has previously proven efficacious for a child and the child's medical practitioner recommends use of this substance, a supplement with a seal of approval is recommended. Various organizations offer this program that provides assurance that the product contains the ingredients listed on the label and that it does not contain harmful levels of contaminants. For an up-to-date list of these organizations, visit [ods.od.nih.gov](http://ods.od.nih.gov). Additionally, every effort should be made to obtain a standardized preparation. Prescribers should also consider known or potential interactions with prescription and OTC medications, possible worsening of medical conditions and concerns about use in pregnancy or in conjunction with surgical interventions.

Additional information can be sought from the following sources:

[NCCAM@nccam.nih.gov](mailto:NCCAM@nccam.nih.gov)

NIH Office of Dietary [Supplements@ods.od.nih.gov](mailto:Supplements@ods.od.nih.gov)