Women’s Health Connection Philosophy on Nutritional Supplements and Medical Foods

Along with lifestyle changes, prescription medications, and prescription hormones, we may recommend nutriceutical supplements and foods classified as “Medical Food” by the FDA. We caution that not all nutritional supplements are created equally. Many people are unaware that not all of the vitamins and nutritional supplements available over the counter at health food stores, pharmacies, supplement stores, grocery stores and large well known chains such as Walmart and Costco, are safe. Although cheap, they may be untested, ineffective and sometimes even dangerous.

- LA Times questions the quality of herbs. Monmaney T Labels’ potency claims often inaccurate, analysis finds. Los Angeles Times, August 31, 1998

- Lactobacillus products mislabeled and contaminated. Hughes, et al. Microbiologic characteristics of Lactobacillus products used for the colonization of the vagina. Obstet Gynecol 1990;75; 244


- Twelve Supplements You Should Avoid: The FDA’s Dirty Dozen, Consumer Reports, Sept 2010


- There are several more...

For these reasons, and because many of these nutritional supplements and medical foods vary in potency depending on what other supplements they are packaged with, and because many can interact with prescription medications, the Medical Director of Women’s Health Connection, Dr. Ravasia, feels strongly that the nutritional supplement industry should be more strongly FDA regulated, that nutriceutical standards should be the same as pharmaceuticals, and that these (sometimes very potent) supplements should be medically monitored by licensed health care professionals.

However, the reality is, they are not, and you don’t know what you are getting. You are often at the mercy of business people with no or little health care background, looking for the best price point, when you purchase supplements over the counter.
For all of these reasons, Dr. Ravasia recommends advising caution when purchasing products over the counter. Because she does not wish to “throw the baby out with the bath water”, and thinks that high quality supplements based on careful scientific research have a strong role to play in your health, she has carefully researched and visited many labs and manufacturing plants and facilities of several nutritional supplement companies, looking for ones that meet the following criteria:

1. Certified for GMP quality and using only GRAS certified ingredients

2. Scientific ingredient selection and formulas, based on published scientific evidence, specific for that formula

3. Comprehensive safety reviews at each level of development, manufacture, processing

4. Human Clinical Evaluations, available in peer reviewed medical literature, to be sure what you are taking reaches the bloodstream in adequate amounts, does not interact with medications or other nutrients, and has the desired effects

5. Leading scientific staff and facilities that would meet and exceed the standards for pharmaceutical manufacturing – no shortcuts

She has fortunately found a few such nutritional supplement companies, albeit not many, that meet all of these high standards, and a few others that come very close. The companies that meet or get very close to these standards do not wholesale to stores and chains, partly because they produce potent products that they believe need to be medically supervised, and partly because they cannot manufacture at this level of quality and still meet the price point expected by most retailers to be competitive in the over the counter market.

All of which means that the some of the supplements we recommend are not found "over the counter" and not readily available by internet. We have made them available through our clinic, under careful supervision. We are confident in their safety and efficacy, after thoroughly researching the options. We are not aware, yet, of any insurance coverage for these products, however, we can give you receipts for possible tax and FLEX plan purposes.

For your convenience, we stock some of the products we recommend in our clinic for purchase. The price of these products takes into account the actual base cost of the manufacturing of these higher quality products, the cost of the staff time to order, inventory, process and account for them, the costs of educating our providers about them, cost of storage space, as well as shipping costs, and costs of products lost to theft and expiration. Although it is somewhat cumbersome, and at times still somewhat cost prohibitive, to offer these products in the office, we continue to offer a limited amount of them on-site because we feel they are a patient service.

Because there are so many nutritional supplements on the market with varying degrees of quality and purity, we have decided to become familiar with just a few lines of products that we feel are of a high quality. With the exception of the products classified as “Medical Food” by the FDA, none of the supplements that we recommend, as with any nutritional
supplements, were developed by these companies with the intent to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. We make a point of reviewing ingredients with you, and why we are recommending them.

Some patients have indicated to us that although they feel much better on the supplements we've suggested, and that it is an inconvenience to purchase the products from our office in person. For that reason, and because there are limitations as to what is available in our office on-site due to space restriction, patients have indicated to us that they wanted an online option. So we have set this up. Again, the price takes into account the cost of the product, the shipping, the cost of maintaining the website, the cost of the financial fees for the credit card purchases, cost of staff training and education, maintenance and tracking of specific patient recommendation on the website and regular review of these, among others.

Many of these high quality product lines are available only through licensed health care providers. We do not necessarily think they are the only supplements you could or should use, or and we are aware that other lines are available, but these are the lines we have researched and become familiar with and comfortable recommending.

Details of recommended medical foods and nutritional supplements, and what is and isn't known about the science behind their ingredients should be part of your discussion with your provider before any product is purchased. Make sure you have reviewed these and that all of your questions are answered.

Women's Health Connection does not participate in any multilevel marketing as we feel this is unethical. Wherever possible, when similar products are available from a variety of companies, we prefer to recommend products whose profits go back into research rather than to a specific individual or individuals within the company.