



Commonly Used Natural Health Products

More and more Canadians are using natural health products (NHPs). It is important to understand how to safely use these products. Read on to learn about the potential health benefits and safety concerns to decide if NHPs are right for you. And always speak to your doctor, healthcare provider or dietitian before taking any of these products.

Learning about Natural Health Products

NHPs come in many forms, including herbal products, vitamin/mineral supplements, and traditional and homeopathic medicines. And just because they are called “natural” doesn’t mean they are always safe. NHPs can interact with medications, nutrients and foods and can even have toxic (dangerous) effects.

Health Canada monitors NHPs and has regulations in place so that products are safe, effective and of high quality. See the [Natural Health Products Directorate](#) for products that are allowed to be sold in Canada.

To see if Health Canada has reviewed a natural health-care product for safety, quality and health claims, look for one of the following on the label:

- Drug Identification Number (DIN)
- Natural Product Number (NPN)
- Drug Identification Number – Homeopathic Medicine (DIN-HM)

Always talk to your doctor, dietitian or healthcare provider about any NHPs that you or your child are taking or thinking about taking. This is especially important if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or are taking medication for another condition. Together, you can come up with a plan that is safe and effective.



Popular Natural Health Products

Here is a list of popular NHPs you can find in health food stores and pharmacies. NHPs are available over-the-counter which means you don't need a prescription to buy them. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or healthcare provider before taking a supplement.

Does ginseng encourage overall health benefits?

No. There is not enough evidence to show that ginseng can improve overall health. Ginseng claims to improve energy, mood, cognitive function (mental health) and blood glucose control for diabetics. It is available in capsules, tablets, powders and teas. Ginseng can interact with drugs and other supplements.

Can St. John's Wort improve mild symptoms of depression?

Yes. Research shows that it may improve mild to moderate depression but NOT severe depression. St. John's Wort should not be combined with antidepressant medications and may decrease the effectiveness of several medicines, including oral contraceptives (birth control pill), HIV medication and drugs for epilepsy, heart disease and depression.

Does Echinacea prevent colds?

No. There is not enough evidence to show that Echinacea is effective in preventing or reducing symptoms of the common cold or respiratory tract infections. It is not recommended for individuals with autoimmune disorders, including HIV or multiple sclerosis.

Are hemp seeds better nutritionally for you than other seeds?

No. Hemp seeds have the same nutrition benefits as other nuts and seeds. Hemp seeds are a source of protein and are rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids. If you enjoy the taste of hemp seeds try them in yogurt, cereal, salads and smoothies or you can use less expensive pumpkin, sesame, sunflower or flax seeds to get the same benefit.

Note: While hemp seeds come from the Cannabis (marijuana) plant, they do not have the same active ingredients as the recreational drug.

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Is noni juice better nutritionally than other juices?

No. Noni juice is no better for you than other juices that you can find at your local store at a lower cost. Noni juice is a liquid supplement made from the fruit of the noni plant found in Polynesia, China and India. Makers of noni juice claim that it can treat and prevent several health conditions, including cancer. However, there is not enough research to show that it has any health benefit or can reduce your risk for chronic disease. Noni juice is high in potassium so it should be avoided if you have kidney disease.

Do goji berries improve mental health?

No. Some evidence suggests daily goji berry consumption for a two-week period can increase your feelings of well-being, while improving mental performance and digestive health. More research is needed. Goji berries are not recommended if you are taking warfarin or other anticoagulants.

Can açai berries reduce chronic disease like cancer or heart disease?

No. The açai berry, either raw or as a juice, claims to fight heart disease, help people lose weight, and prevent aging and cancer because of its high amount of antioxidants. However, there is not enough research to show that this is true. You can get the same antioxidants from other vegetables and fruit. To reduce your risk of chronic disease, follow Canada's Food Guide and eat 7-10 vegetable and fruit servings each day.

Are chia seeds/salba a good alternative to wheat-based products?

Yes. Chia seeds or salba are considered a safe and nutritious choice for those with gluten-sensitivities or intolerances, like [Celiac disease](#). Research has found that salba is rich in omega-3 fats, protein, calcium, magnesium, iron and antioxidants.

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