

DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS: The real deal?

Trap

Health-conscious, 52-year-old Mary was looking to slow the effects of aging and improve her overall health. She ordered a free trial of a product she saw advertised on late night TV, available for purchase only on the Internet. It promised to increase her energy and help her sleep at night too. After taking some pills for two weeks, she started having headaches and chest pains. Her doctor told her to stop taking the supplements immediately. What should Mary have done?

Tips

Many online companies offer dietary supplements, and while supplements can be used safely by most people, some can be harmful. Some important tips to consider before purchasing supplements are:

- Don't be influenced by celebrity endorsements of a product. Check with your doctor first as some supplements may interact with your prescription drugs.
- Shop around before you buy from an out-of-state or foreign company. You may be able to find comparable products locally.
- Read all the terms and conditions of the purchase sale. A free trial may obligate you to buy additional product with automatic monthly billing and deliveries or convert to a membership if not canceled within the trial period.
- Be skeptical of "miracle" supplements, "wonder" cures or any product offering a "quick fix." If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Do your own research with agencies such as National Institutes of Health, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dietarysupplements.html>, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, <http://www.fda.gov>, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, <http://www.nutrition.gov>.

For more information, call Palm Beach County Consumer Affairs at 561-712-6600 (Boca/Delray residents call 1-888-852-7362 toll free)