NORTHEAST OHIO LIVER ALLIANCE

YOUR LIVER MATTERS

Community Health Education Series

SUPPLEMENTS AND YOUR LIVER

What Helps • What Can Harm • How To Stay Safe

Your liver is a large organ on the right side of your belly. It cleans your blood, helps you digest food, and stores energy. Many people take pills, powders, or herbal supplements. Some may help the liver a little — others can hurt it.
Always talk with your doctor before you start or stop any supplement.

LABELS AREN'T ALWAYS ACCURATE

Supplements aren't checked as carefully as regular medicines — what's on the label isn't always what's in the bottle.

"NATURAL" ≠ "SAFE"

Some plants and herbs can seriously harm your liver, even though they come from nature.

MORE IS NOT BETTER

Taking large or extra doses raises your risk — stick to what your doctor recommends.

BLENDS ARE RISKIEST

Products with many ingredients mixed together (weight-loss or muscle-building blends) cause the most liver harm.

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Supplements That May Help the Liver

Early or modest evidence, mostly in fatty liver disease — not cures. Ask your doctor first.

Vitamin E

May help lower liver swelling in people with NASH (a fatty liver condition). High doses aren't right for everyone — caution if you have prostate cancer risk or heart problems. Only take with your doctor's OK.

Milk Thistle (silymarin)

Some studies show it may lower liver blood-test numbers. Evidence is modest, but it's generally considered low-risk

Coffee & Green Tea (as a drink)

Regular coffee is linked to better liver health. Note: brewed green tea is very different from concentrated green tea extract pills, which can be harmful (see below).

Vitamin D & Probiotics

Early studies suggest a slight improvement in liver blood tests for fatty liver disease. More research is needed.

Even "helpful" supplements don't replace the best liver care: healthy weight, good food, exercise, limiting alcohol, and treating diabetes.

Supplements That Can Harm the Liver

Linked to real liver injury — sometimes serious enough for hospitalization, transplant, or death. Avoid, or use only with your doctor's OK.

Green Tea Extract Pills (High Dose)

Can cause sudden, sometimes severe liver damage. Genetics may raise risk for some people.

Turmeric / Curcumin pills (High Dose)

Reports of liver injury are rising, often after 1–4 months of use. Turmeric as a cooking spice is different and much lower risk.

Garcinia Cambogia

A weight-loss herb linked to serious liver injury.

Ashwagandha

Linked to liver injury — often with yellow skin and itching — usually within weeks to a few months.

Kratom

Linked to liver injury.

Anabolic Steroids / "Bodybuilding" Blends

Can cause long-lasting liver problems with yellow skin.

Multi-Ingredient Weight-Loss Blends

"Fat burner" mixes with many ingredients have caused outbreaks of liver injury.

Other Risky Herbs

Chaparral, germander, comfrey, kava, ephedra (ma huang), Jin Bu Huan, pennyroyal oil, and skullcap.

This newsletter is for learning only — it is not medical advice.
Information provided by Northeast Ohio Liver Alliance is not a substitute for guidance from your physician or health care provider; NEOLA does not endorse any specific doctor, hospital, medical group, or treatment.

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Warning Signs of Liver Trouble

Stop the supplement and call your doctor right away if you notice:

Yellow Skin or Yellow Eyes

Dark Brown Urine

Pale or Clay-Colored Stool

Itchy Skin

Upper-Right Belly Pain

Very Tired, Nauseated, or not hungry

How to Stay Safe

Ways to protect your liver from harm

- Tell your doctor about every supplement you take — bring the bottles to your visits.
- Pick single-ingredient products over mixed “blends” when you can.
- Do not take more than the label says.
- Be extra careful if you already have a liver problem or drink alcohol.
- Supplement being sold in a store does not prove it is safe.

NIH LiverTox® - https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK547852/

A free NIH database of known medications and supplements that have been known to cause harm - search your medications here if you’re interested in seeing more information on potential liver harm.