



Fact Sheet On Herbal And Other Natural Products



In Canada, products such as herbal remedies, vitamins, minerals, homeopathic medicines, traditional medicines (like traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicines), probiotics, and other items like amino acids and essential fatty acids are categorized as natural health products (NHPs).

Definition

A product that is not classified as a drug in Canada such as herbal remedies, vitamins, minerals, homeopathic medicines, traditional medicines (like traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicines), probiotics, and other items like amino acids and essential fatty acids are categorized as natural health products (NHPs). These products are regulated under the Natural Health Products Regulations, which came into effect on January 1, 2004. NHPs are available for purchase in pharmacies, health food stores, grocery stores, and from naturopaths. They are intended to restore or maintain good health and are often made from natural sources such as plants, animals, microorganisms, and marine sources. NHPs come in various forms, including tablets, capsules, tinctures, solutions, creams, ointments, and drops. It's important to note that while NHPs are generally safe for use without a prescription, they are not without risks.

Health Canada Approval Numbers

Health Canada regulates Herbal and Natural products to ensure they are safe, effective, and of high quality. Consumers should look for an eight-digit Natural Product Number (NPN) or Homeopathic Medicine Number (DIN-HM) on the label, indicating that the product has been authorized for sale in Canada and that the label will list the medicinal and non-medicinal ingredients, their source and potency. For more information, you can visit [Health Canada's page](#) on natural health products. Products without these number designations have no assurance that they are a quality, safe or effective product. These products may include ingredients in varying amounts or not listed on the label.





What Could the Natural Health Product Label be Missing?

Some Natural Health Products may lack transparency in their ingredient listings. These undisclosed ingredients can pose significant health risks, especially for individuals with allergies or sensitivities. For instance, unlisted fillers such as wheat or soy can trigger allergic reactions in susceptible individuals. Additionally, some products were found to contain contaminants with known toxicity or adverse interactions with other herbs, supplements, or medications. To mitigate these risks, it's crucial to choose NHPs from reputable manufacturers who adhere to strict quality control standards. Consumers should look for products that have been tested for purity and accurately list all ingredients on their labels. Consulting with healthcare professionals before using NHPs can also help ensure their safe and effective use.

There are many unknowns when taking Natural Health Products.

Some of the unknowns may include

- Safety during pregnancy or lactation
- Little or no information on use in children
- Long term effects
- Little or no information of use in people with chronic diseases or decreased liver or kidney function
- Little or no information on interactions with other drugs, products or foods (e.g. drug interactions with St. John's Wort, Ginkgo)

Natural products may often be overlooked as something to mention to healthcare providers; we forget we are taking them because they are 'natural' but they can have a big impact. We need to remember that interactions, even with foods like grapefruit are fairly common, yet frequently overlooked. Another example where natural products can interfere with pharmaceuticals is St. John's Wort. It is used as a natural product to aid depression, but must be cleared from our system before taking a pharmaceutical antidepressant and it interferes with the effectiveness of oral contraceptives.

Open communication with your healthcare providers ensures safer and more effective care.

If you are seeing a Naturopath or Homeopath it is recommended that they are listed in either the National Naturopath Association or Canadian Society of Homeopaths.





References:

Health Canada

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/natural-non-prescription.html>
- https://www.uoguelph.ca/news/2013/10/study_herbal_pr.html
- <https://inspection.canada.ca/en/food-safety-industry/food-chemistry-and-microbiology/food-safety-testing-reports-and-journal-articles/undeclared-allergens-and-gluten-ground-spicesherbs>
- <https://www.cand.ca/naturopathic-medicine-today/>
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