

Healthy Science™ *by Mannatech*

Supplements 101: The Basics of Dietary Supplement Labels

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From where I sit in Mannatech's Research and Development (R&D) department, I see many things that make me proud. First and foremost, I'm proud that Mannatech makes great products.

I'm also proud of our expert Regulatory Affairs (RA) and Quality Assurance (QA) teams that work very hard to ensure that what you read on our labels is what you will find in our products. That's why I often feel frustrated when I see other dietary supplements that are popular but clearly aren't what they say (or imply) they are. How do I know this? While I'm not a Food and Drug Administration (FDA, which regulates dietary supplements) expert, I have learned from our RA department a few basics about reading product labels. Knowing these basics (Supplements 101) you, too, can be a savvy consumer, armed to cut through the confusion and make—and help your friends make—informed supplement purchases.

The FDA requires that dietary supplement product labels include a Supplement Facts box and ingredient information.

- 1) The Supplement Facts box, "the box," is the "meat" of the label. Bottom line, FDA requires that this box includes the amount (if present) of calories, fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates and protein in a product. If vitamins or minerals are present at or above 2% of their Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI), they must also be listed in the box.
- 2) The Ingredients section lists the specific product ingredients beginning with those appearing at the highest percentages first, all the way down to the lowest percentages. [Tip: Watch for products that list water as the first ingredient!]



Dietary supplement companies have some freedom regarding how they present this information. But I prefer Mannatech's approach, which includes all specific, detailed nutrient information in the box, and then provides a list of formulation ingredients in an "Other Ingredients" section. This approach leaves no room for confusion. What you see is what you get.

In contrast, I've seen numerous products (particularly juice "supplements") that minimize the amount of information included in the box, and merely provide a long list of ingredients. What is notable is that many of these products provide no vitamin or mineral information in the box, which means that these products probably contain little—or none—of these. I have three juice supplements sitting on my desk, and none of them list any vitamins or minerals—which we all know are key components of fruits and vegetables. Without a minimum of 2% of at least some vitamins or minerals, I have serious questions about what nutrients are provided in these "supplements"!

Products with a box entitled "Nutrition Facts" rather than "Supplement Facts" are considered by the manufacturer to be foods, but you can use the same simple tool to do a high-level quality check on these as well. If very low amounts of or no vitamins and/or minerals are listed in the box, you may have legitimate concerns about what exactly is in the product.

Of course, there is a lot more that you can do to be a savvy supplement label reader, but that's all you need to know to be Supplements 101 certified!

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