

“Consumers should be aware that just because a product is labeled ‘natural’ or from an herbal source it is not guaranteed to be safe,” said Dr. Michael Friedman, Deputy Commissioner of Food and Drugs. “The effects of ephedrine alkaloids are potentially powerful ones. We urge people to talk to their doctors before using dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids, and to always use them with caution.”

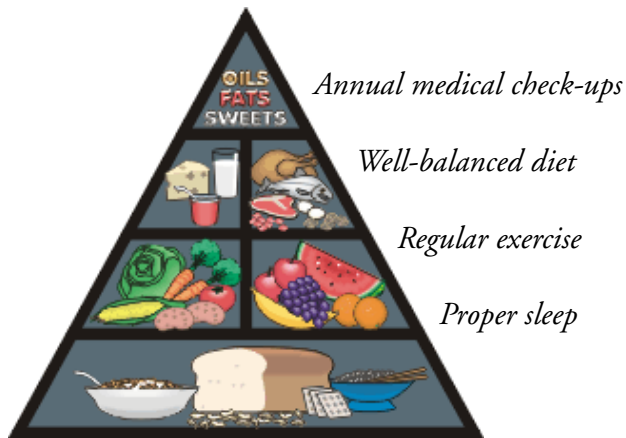
Protect yourself - get the facts

Some people believe that if they purchase a product in a health food store, it is healthy for them. But the truth is that taking certain substances can have serious consequences. Remember, if you are trying to change your fitness level, it takes time and work. There are no healthy shortcuts. To learn more about ephedrine and other substance abuse, visit NCADD’s website at www.ncadd-middlesex.org.

Ephedrine: The Real Facts

Alternatives to the use of Ephedrine

There are healthy alternatives to ephedrine for weight loss, increased energy, and toned muscles. If you are not getting the results you want at the gym, consider working with a personal trainer. The most effective approach is to talk to your doctor and consider the following:



The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit health education organization. Our mission is to promote the health and well-being of individuals and communities of Middlesex County through the reduction or elimination of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use problems. Established in 1980, NCADD is a leader in providing quality education and prevention programs. For more information about our programs and services, call us at 732-254-3344 or visit our website at www.ncadd-middlesex.org.

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What is Ephedrine?

Ephedrine is a powerful herbal stimulant that is used as a “dietary supplement” to enhance energy and promote weight loss. Derived from the plant Ephedra, it is chemically similar to amphetamines and has potentially powerful stimulant effects on the nervous system and heart.

Manufacturers use the words “natural,” “herbal” and “clinically proven” to convince consumers to buy ephedrine-containing products. However, no long-term medical studies have been conducted on the benefits of ephedrine. The dosage of ephedrine in “dietary supplements” can vary dramatically and dangerously. In fact, ephedrine is NOT regulated by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), so consumers can easily be misinformed on the potency, purity, and safety of ephedrine-based products.

In its pure form, ephedrine is a white powder and sold over the counter (OTC) in a tablet or capsule form. It is marketed as *ma huang*, *ma huang extract*, and *ephedra*. These ingredients are found on the labels of many OTC products including Herbal Life, Stacker 2, Yellow Jackets, Xenadrine EFX, Ripped Fuel, and Hydroxycut.



What Ephedrine does in the Body?

When digested, ephedrine produces a mild increase in energy. Users may experience alertness, exaggerated feeling of well-being, feeling “high,” and a reduced appetite.

Because ephedrine alkaloids are heart and nervous system stimulants, certain individuals, including those with hypertension, heart conditions and neurologic disorders, should avoid their use. Pregnant women, too, should avoid the use of dietary supplements with ephedrine alkaloids.

Adverse Effects

Using ephedrine poses serious health risks. When used in combination with prescriptions or OTC drugs, there may be dangerous drug interactions. It is critical that patients inform their doctor or pharmacist if they are using products with ephedrine.

Kola nut, a source of caffeine, is often combined with ephedrine to increase the stimulant effect. This combination can increase the risk of blood vessel constriction, rapid heart beat, and a sudden rise in blood pressure.

Documented adverse effects of ephedrine include dizziness, tremors, high blood pressure, anxiety, insomnia, irregular heartbeat, vomiting, sweating, and fever. More seriously reported complications and overdoses have led to heart attack, stroke, seizures, comas, and even death.

What is being Done?

In 1997 the Food and Drug Administration proposed to reduce risks associated with dietary supplement products containing ephedrine alkaloids. The proposal would prohibit the marketing of dietary supplements containing 8 milligrams or more of ephedrine alkaloids per serving. Labeling that recommends a total daily intake of 24 mg or more would also not be allowed.

In addition, the proposal would require label statements instructing consumers not to use the product for more than 7 days and would prohibit label claims that encourage short-term excessive use to enhance the claimed effect.

Products would be required to bear a labeling statement that “Taking more than the recommended serving may result in heart attack, stroke, seizure or death.” The proposal would also prohibit the use of other stimulant ingredients such as botanical sources of caffeine with ephedrine alkaloids.

The FDA has concluded that, given the widespread use of ephedrine alkaloids, a consumer education campaign about these products is warranted. Currently, the FDA is reviewing reports and calling for the research community to further study the effects of ephedrine.

Due to ephedrine-related deaths of servicemen, the U.S. Marines and Navy have banned the sale of ephedrine products on their bases. Other military branches are currently following suit.