

The Journal of the American Medical Association reports that between 60,000 and 106,000 deaths per year in the United States are caused by prescription drugs. See *JAMA*, April 15, 1998—Vol 279, No. 15. Fortunately, adverse reactions to foods and dietary supplements are far more rare than adverse reactions to drugs. However, we each consume a larger variety and quantity of foods than drugs. Because of this, and because each of us can react differently, an allergic or isolated reaction to a food or supplement is a possibility. Here's helpful information about what to do if you or someone you care for has what appears to be an adverse reaction to a food or a dietary supplement.

What types of reactions could I have?

The most common adverse reaction is an allergic reaction. In order to reduce the risk of an allergic reaction, carefully read all labels and buy products from reputable manufacturers who accurately disclose the ingredients in their products. If you need help finding these manufacturers, ask your local health food retailer for recommendations.

How do I know what caused my reaction?

Take time to carefully review what might have caused the reaction. Doctors and experts in toxicology look at several different factors in trying to determine the cause of a particular reaction.

Ask yourself:



Is this reaction a side effect of drugs I am taking?



Did I eat anything different in the last few days?

Have I used any new or unusual cosmetics or other personal care items?



Could my symptom be related to an underlying illness?

Am I drinking too much coffee or alcohol or smoking too much?



Do I have a healthy diet?



Am I sleeping enough?

Have I been exposed to anything unusual in the air or my environment?

Asking yourself these questions can help limit the number of possible causes and may lead you to an answer more quickly.

What should I do if I have an adverse reaction?

Whether or not you know the potential cause of the reaction, follow these steps:

- **Seek immediate medical attention where appropriate.** If the condition is serious or could become serious, call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.
- **Contact the manufacturer.** Responsible manufacturers print a 1-800 number on their product bottles and provide knowledgeable staff who can answer questions or direct you to appropriate answers or care. If your product doesn't include a 1-800 number, contact the retailer where you purchased the product.
- **Report the problem to the proper government agency.** *The Food and Drug Administration and other federal agencies are responsible for removing unsafe products from the market.*

How can I reach the FDA or another government agency about my concerns?



Various state and federal agencies employ personnel who can help respond to concerns or questions about adverse reactions. Following is contact information for some of these agencies:

- For emergencies, call FDA at its main emergency number (1-301-443-1240), 24 hours per day.
- For non-emergencies, contact the consumer complaint coordinator at any FDA district office. A complete list of district office phone numbers can be found at: www.fda.gov/opacom/backgrounders/complain.html.

How can I report an adverse event?

FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) has an Adverse Event Reporting System (CAERS) that can be contacted in any of the following ways:

- By phone at **301-436-2405**
- By email at **CAERS@cfsan.fda.gov**
- By mail at
FDA, CAERS, HFS-700, 2A-012/CPK1,
5100 Paint Branch Parkway,
College Park, MD 20740

You can contact FDA's MedWatch Program in any of the following ways:

- Online at www.fda.gov/medwatch/feedback.htm
- By phone at 800-FDA-1088
- By mail with a postage-paid FDA form 3500, available at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/medwatch/>
- By sending it to
MedWatch, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD
20852-9787
or sending it via fax to 1-800-FDA-0178.

For non-emergencies related to products purchased via the Internet, fill out an online form on FDA's website at vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/qa-top.html (see link to "Form to Report Unlawful Sales")

You may also contact any local poison control center, local or state health agencies, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Products Safety Commission, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and they will forward your report to the FDA.