

Drugs vs. Dietary Supplements

Here are the major differences in the government safety regulations for prescription and over-the-counter drugs vs. dietary supplements:

	Prescription and OTC drugs	Dietary supplements	Explanation
Testing for hazards	✓	x	Prescription and OTC drugs must be proved effective. Dietary supplements can be introduced without any testing for safety or efficacy.
Disclosing risks	✓	x	Drug labels and inserts must mention all possible adverse effects and interactions. Supplement makers don't have to put safety warnings on the labels, even for products with known serious hazards.
Ensuring product quality	✓	x	Drugs must conform to "good manufacturing practices" that guarantee that their contents are pure and in the quantities stated on the label. Regulations that would impose similar standards on supplements are still not finalized by the FDA.
Reporting problems	✓	x	Drug companies are required to tell the FDA about any reports of product-related adverse events that they receive from any source. Supplement makers don't have to report adverse events. Overall, the FDA estimates that it learns of less than 1 percent of adverse events involving dietary supplements. Visit www.ConsumersUnion.org to learn more.

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