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Safety Concerns Are an Important Reason People Don't Take Supplements

95 percent of adults support requiring manufacturers to list products and ingredients with the FDA

Most American adults—4 in 5—have tried supplements, products that range from vitamins and minerals to plant and animal extracts, hormones, and amino acids. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) oversees the safety of supplements, and nearly all adults say the agency should have this responsibility. However, 7 in 10 think the FDA is unable to keep them safe from harmful products with the existing regulatory tools. Ninety-five percent support requiring that manufacturers inform the FDA about all the supplements they make and their ingredients.

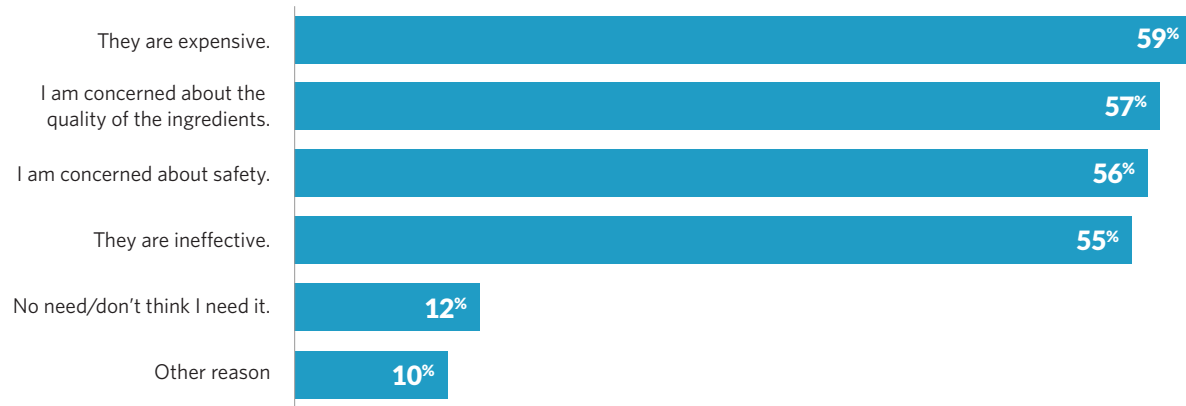
These findings and the following data come from a nationally representative survey of Americans age 18 and older, conducted in May 2019 for The Pew Charitable Trusts.¹

Figure 1

Many Americans Who Aren't Using Supplements Cite Safety Concerns

Reasons adults have not taken such products recently or ever

Survey asked: Why have you never taken a supplement/not taken a supplement in the past two years?



Note: Respondents could select more than one reason. Data shown for respondents who reported never taking supplements or not taking one in the past two years.

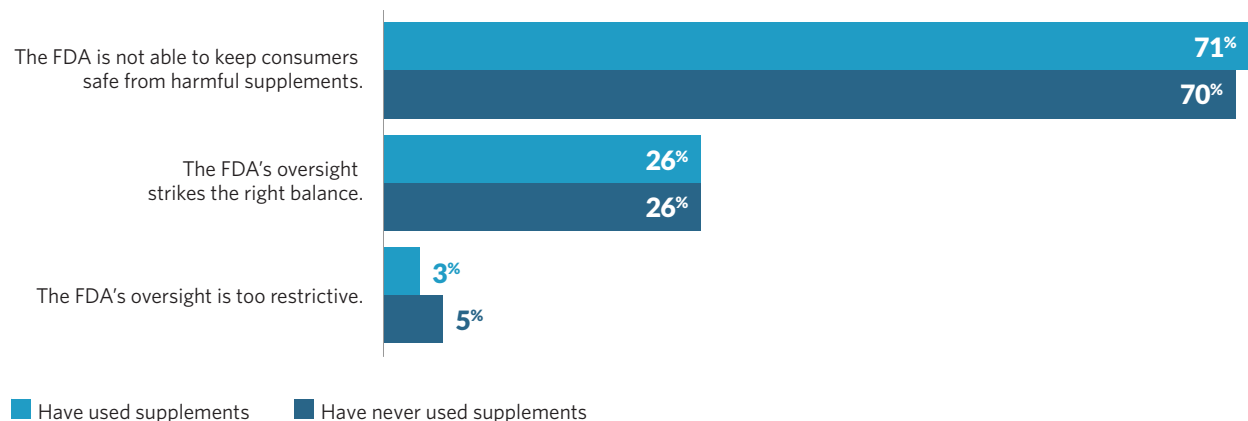
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Figure 2

Most Adults Say FDA Cannot Protect Consumers From Harmful Supplements

Perceptions of agency oversight, by user history

Survey asked: Thinking about the FDA's current oversight of supplements, which comes closest to your viewpoint?



Note: Respondents read this oversight description with the question: "Under current law, the FDA does not test or approve supplements before they are made available to the public, and the FDA does not know which products are on the market and what they contain. The FDA is mainly limited to acting after a supplement product on the market has been shown to be harmful." Percentages may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

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Figure 3

Strong Support for Mandatory Supplement Product Listing With FDA

Most adults think manufacturers should help pay for enhanced oversight

Survey asked: How much do you support or oppose the following statement: ___?

In order for the FDA to know what supplement products are on the market, manufacturers should be required to give the agency a list of the products they make and their ingredients.



■ Strongly oppose ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Somewhat support ■ Strongly support

Congress should ensure that the FDA has adequate funding to oversee supplements and to take appropriate action against unsafe products.



■ Strongly oppose ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Somewhat support ■ Strongly support

If a mandatory product listing requirement is put into place, supplement manufacturers should pay a small fee to the FDA to help cover some of the costs of the listing database so that taxpayer dollars would not be needed to pay for it all.



■ Strongly oppose ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Somewhat support ■ Strongly support

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

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Michele Blackwell

The benefits of a product listing requirement

The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 governs the FDA's oversight of supplements and generally allows for review of a product's safety only after it is on the market and officials receive reports of potential health risks or consumer harm. Consequently, the agency knows little about the estimated 80,000 supplement products available to consumers.

Requiring manufacturers to provide the FDA with basic information about their supplement products, including their ingredients, would improve the agency's ability to safeguard public health with its existing regulatory tools. For example, if the agency learned of risks associated with a specific ingredient, it could easily pinpoint other products with the same component and take steps to alert manufacturers and consumers. Product lists published by the agency would also give retailers a mechanism to ensure that supplements they sell have been listed with the FDA.

Endnote

- 1 SSRS, an independent research company, conducted the survey for Pew via an online probability panel. Interviews took place May 17-29, 2019, among a sample of 1,000 total respondents. The margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 4.6 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of error is larger for subgroups. For full results and methodology, please visit: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2019/10/01/most-supplement-users-back-enhanced-fda-oversight-of-these-products>.

For further information, please visit:
pewtrusts.org/healthcareproducts

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