**Buyer Beware: Regulating Dietary Supplements**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates dietary supplements under a different set of regulations than those covering food and drug products. Under the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994, dietary supplement manufacturers do not need to prove the efficacy and safety of their products to the FDA prior to marketing them.

Dietary supplement manufacturers are required to print the following on their labels:

> "This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease."

Given the lack of oversight, ask yourself if the manufacturer’s claims are too good to be true and remember that none of the supplements marketed for tinnitus treatment have FDA approval.

The FDA periodically inspects facilities manufacturing dietary supplements, and there are several organizations that monitor ingredients for safety, offering seals of approval on products properly manufactured, containing the ingredients listed on the label, and not containing harmful levels of contaminants. These seals of approval don’t prove safety or efficacy.

For more information on dietary supplements that carry seals of approval, see:

- U.S. Pharmacopeia at www.usp.org
- ConsumerLab.com at www.consumerlab.com
- NSF International at www.nsf.org

“Caveat emptor”

**Dietary Supplements: Safety and Risk Considerations**

According to the National Institutes of Health, many dietary supplements contain active ingredients that can strongly affect the body, so it’s important to be aware of possible side effects. For instance, if taken before or after surgery, certain dietary supplements can affect your response to anesthesia. Dietary supplements can also interact with certain prescription drugs in ways that might cause problems. A few examples include:

- Vitamin K can reduce the ability of the blood thinner Coumadin® to prevent blood from clotting.
- St. John’s wort can speed the breakdown of many drugs (including antidepressants and birth control pills) and thereby reduce these drugs’ effectiveness.
- Antioxidant supplements, like vitamins C and E, might reduce the effectiveness of some types of cancer chemotherapy.

Also, keep in mind that something labeled “natural” doesn’t necessarily mean it’s safe. A supplement’s safety depends on such things as chemical makeup, how it works in the body, the dosage, and how its prepared. Certain herbs, such as kava – used for alleviating insomnia and/or anxiety – can cause liver damage.

Take the time to talk to your healthcare provider and/or pharmacist about dietary supplements that you’re considering taking, because – unlike prescription drugs – the FDA does not require dietary supplement manufacturers to prove their effectiveness or safety prior to sale.