

Take time to choose brands, stores for supplements

• from **ADVICE** on page 8

min has to have the same active ingredient," said Ms. Mina. "What's different is the way it's processed."

In the case of folates, the synthetic version is naturally absorbed more easily by the body. But the opposite is true with vitamin E, she said.

In many cases, there's no difference, said Mr. Patel.

"It's a different key that opens the same door," he said.

The choice may have a bigger impact on the pocketbook than the body, said Ms. Mina.

"Natural could be higher priced because it's a selling point," she said. "People like the word."

With the dizzying number of supplements to choose from, learning how to shop smart is key.

That means taking the time to search out reputable brand names and stores.

Look for childproof packaging and directions written in both French and English.

Also, always check the expiry date.

Products that make health claims should be avoided, said Ms. Mina.

"There shouldn't be a health claim," she said. "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

Another good idea is to scan the package for a Drug Identification Number (DIN).

Currently, vitamins and minerals are regulated by Canada's Food and Drug Act.

That means they have been assigned a DIN by the government.

Though herbal products are headed in that direction, they're not all there yet. That seems appropriate to Ms. Vaughan-Sherman, who said that herbal supplements are not drugs.

Attaching a DIN to herbal products could feed misconceptions that they are, she worried.

"A lot of people are scared off. They think they're dangerous," said Ms. Vaughan-Sherman. "It's in a bottle, it is pills and they

think they are drugs."

But Ms. Mina and Mr. Patel see regulation as a way of ensuring a healthy standardization. Then the consumer could be sure the product is consistent regardless of the brand, said Mr. Patel. Unregulated products may vary in dosage or even content.

Some herbal suppliers have already gone that route, slapping a DIN on as many products as possible.

But the move towards regulation may be propelled by those worried that herbal supplements are biting into the pharmaceutical share of the health market, said Ms. Vaughan-Sherman.

"They're upset because (herbal products) work with none of the side effects," she said. "I guess that's why they're pushing this." Still, regulation will probably not harm the herbal industry, said Ms. Vaughan-Sherman.

"It's a way, it's not a trend," she said. "People are more health conscious."

Whither taxation?

• from **PUSHES** on page 3

warned Mr. Chudleigh.

"International capital has wings. It can go anywhere in the world. If Canada has very high tax levels, which we do, we'll start to lose out on that kind of investment," he said.

"It's a slow transition. It is insidious. It begins to sap your strength 10 years down the road."

But preparing for fiscal downturns is why federal tax cuts haven't come sooner, said Mr. Reed.

"There's a feeling in caucus that we should never allow ourselves to get into the financial situation we inherited in 1993," he said. "I would say I won't be forgetting 1993 as long as I have the honour to serve the riding."

A safety net for bad times is the number one priority of the government, said Mr. Reed.

"There has been a big controversy over this so-called surplus in employment insurance," he said. "The fact is it's a rainy day fund. It is there, thank God, because it wasn't in 1993."

Today, the government is able to work with money it already has, added Mr. Reed.

"When you see spending commitments being made now, the money is already in the account," he said.

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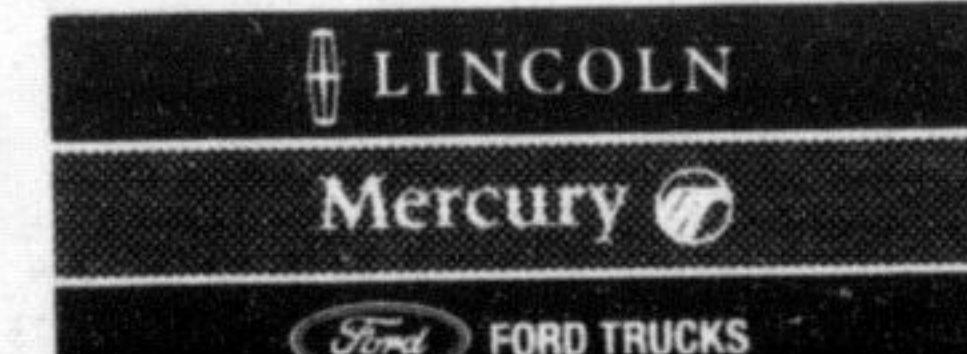
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