



Supplements During Cancer Treatment: Helping You Make Safe Choices During Cancer Treatment

Many people diagnosed with cancer wonder if vitamins, herbs, or supplements can improve treatment, reduce side effects, or strengthen the immune system. **The answer is sometimes, but not always.**

While some supplements may be appropriate for certain patients, others can interfere with chemotherapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy, radiation therapy, or hormonal treatments. Because every treatment plan is unique, it's important to talk with your oncology team before starting anything new.

Always tell your oncology team if you take:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ✓ Vitamins | ✓ Mushroom supplements |
| ✓ Herbal supplements | ✓ CBD or cannabis products |
| ✓ Protein powders | ✓ Essential oils taken by mouth |
| ✓ Greens powders | ✓ Over-the-counter "immune boosters" |

Why Can Supplements Be a Problem?

Unlike prescription medications, dietary supplements are not approved by the FDA for effectiveness before being sold. Different brands may contain different amounts of active ingredients, and purity can vary between products.

Some supplements may:

- Change how chemotherapy is absorbed
- Increase or decrease drug levels
- Increase bleeding risk
- Affect liver enzymes that process medications
- Reduce the effectiveness of treatment

Supplements That May Require Extra Caution

There are several supplements that have been associated with potential interactions during active chemotherapy and should only be used under the guidance of your oncology team. These include:

- Garlic supplements
- Ginkgo
- Ginseng
- Echinacea
- St. John's Wort
- Grapefruit or grapefruit juice
- Kava
- Ashwagandha
- Licorice
- Acai products
- Certain turmeric/curcumin supplements
- Some probiotic formulations

Important: This does not mean these products are always harmful. Their safety depends on your specific cancer, treatment, other medications, and overall health.

Supplements Sometimes Used During Treatment

Some supplements have been studied to help manage specific treatment-related side effects or nutritional deficiencies. However, they should only be taken if recommended by your healthcare team. Examples discussed in the presentation include:

Ginger

- May help reduce nausea and digestive discomfort.
- Use caution if taking blood thinners.

Folic Acid or Methylfolate

- May be appropriate in select situations depending on your treatment.

Selenium

- Has been studied for protecting healthy cells, but excessive doses can cause side effects and are not appropriate for everyone.

What About Antioxidants?

Many people believe that large doses of vitamins A, C, and E are always beneficial.

However, some chemotherapy and radiation treatments work by creating oxidative stress that damages cancer cells. High-dose antioxidant supplements may interfere with these treatments in some situations. **This is one reason you should never start high-dose vitamins without discussing them with your oncology team.**

Food First

For most patients, nutrients from food are preferred over supplements whenever possible. Focus on:

-  Colorful vegetables
 -  Fruits
 -  Lean protein
 -  Fish
 -  Nuts
 -  Whole grains
 -  Cruciferous vegetables (Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale)
 -  Healthy fats
-

Ask yourself:

- ✓ Have I discussed this with my oncologist?
- ✓ Does my pharmacist know I'm taking it?
- ✓ Is it being used to correct a documented deficiency?
- ✓ Could it interfere with my treatment?

If the answer is "I'm not sure," ask before starting it.

Questions?

Valsa HemeOnc Partners provides personalized oncology education to help patients better understand cancer treatments, supportive care, nutrition, and evidence-based resources so you can make informed decisions throughout your cancer journey.

www.vhopcares.com