
Supplements and Cancer

Vitamin, mineral, herbal, and botanical supplements are often promoted as helpful or essential additions to the diet. However, they are generally not helpful, and may be harmful.

Q&A: Supplements and Cancer

Question	Answer
Do supplements protect against cancer?	No. Supplements do not protect against cancer. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables has been shown to provide the vitamins and minerals needed to help with cancer prevention.
Do antioxidant supplements help with cancer treatment?	No. In the same way that the antioxidants in fruits and vegetables are thought to protect healthy cells from cancer, antioxidant supplements may also protect the cancer cells against treatment.
When are vitamin or mineral supplements beneficial?	There are times when vitamin and mineral supplements are recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Folic acid: recommended for women who may become pregnant.• Vitamin D and iron: recommended for pregnant women and nursing mothers.• Vitamin A, C and D: recommended for children between 6 months and 5 years of age.• Multivitamin and/or vitamin D: recommended for older people with low calorie needs.
Is it safe for patients to take a basic multivitamin during treatment?	No. Not all multivitamin products are appropriate. Check the label to be sure that it contains no more than 100% of the Daily Value of each nutrient. <i>The Percent Daily Value (DV) is a guide to how much of that nutrient is in one serving of food, compared to how much is needed in a day. For example, if the label lists 15% for calcium, it means that one serving provides 15% of the calcium that an average, healthy adult needs daily.</i>
Can herbal medicines interfere with chemo or radiation treatment?	Yes. Most herbals and botanicals contain antioxidants, which can interfere with cancer treatment.

<p>Could taking large doses of vitamin and mineral supplements cause cancer?</p>	<p>Here are some of the vitamins and minerals that research has linked with increased risk of cancer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin A, B6, B12 may increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers. • Vitamin E and selenium have been linked to prostate cancer.
<p>What are the risks of taking supplements during cancer treatment?</p>	<p>Here are some of the risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some dietary supplements can cause skin sensitivity and reactions during radiation treatment. • Some dietary supplements can interact with chemotherapy medications. This could affect the results from your chemotherapy.
<p>What should I do if I want to take a supplement?</p>	<p>Talk to your Oncologist or Registered Dietitian. They will be able to help you understand your individual needs, whether the supplement is safe for you to take during treatment, and how to achieve and maintain a healthy nutritional status.</p>

Trusted Resources for More Information:

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. (2018). 7 Cancer Tips for Your Diet. Accessed at eatright.org.
- American Cancer Society. (2015). Risks and Side Effects of Dietary Supplements. Accessed at cancer.org.
- American Institute for Cancer Research. (2018). Recommendations for Cancer Prevention: Don't use supplements to protect against cancer. Accessed at aicr.org.
- American Institute for Cancer Research. (2018). Supplements and Cancer Survivorship. Accessed at aicr.org.
- The ASCO Post. (2014). Avoiding Antioxidant-Drug Interactions During Cancer Treatment. Accessed at ascopost.com.
- NIH. (2016). Vitamin E. Accessed at ods.od.nih.gov.