

Herbs and Chemotherapy



Question:

How do herbs and dietary supplements interact with chemotherapy and biotherapy drugs?

Answer:

Herbal and dietary supplements are used in cancer treatment to:

1. Help strengthen the immune system
2. Decrease inflammation
3. Help ease the side effects of chemotherapy, biotherapy and radiation.

Herbal and dietary supplements can have an effect on chemotherapy, biotherapy and radiation. Some supplements may help prevent cancer or assist in cancer recovery. Other supplements may have a negative impact on cancer treatments by interacting with treatments or with each other. That's why it's important to talk with your Doctor about the reasons why you want to take supplements.

Herbal and dietary supplements are considered a "food" by the FDA, and do not have the same testing, manufacturing, and labeling standards as prescription drugs. It's a good idea to look into the supplements you're thinking about taking, and know amounts to take, when to take them so you are an informed consumer. Also, is there another way to achieve your goals? Going for a walk or being active in other ways provides health benefits such as reducing inflammation.

Research shows that some supplements are contaminated or don't contain what's on the label. It's a good idea to buy supplements that have been analyzed by ConsumerLab.com, or have a USP or NSF seal on the label. These seals show the supplements have undergone quality control testing.

Culinary herbs and spices are generally safe. Using herbs and spices in foods and drinks can help with cancer prevention and survivorship as they contain phytochemicals and other nutrients that help support the body including the immune system. A registered dietitian who is a Specialist in Oncology

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Nutrition (CSO) can talk with you about using dietary and herbal supplements.

The following websites have information and give the pros and cons of herbal and dietary supplements:

www.cancer.org

www.webMD.com

www.nia.nih.gov/health/health/dietary-supplements

The original question and answer were generously donated by Diana Dyer, MS, RD a cancer survivor, registered dietitian, organic garlic farmer, and the author of "A Dietitian's Cancer Story: Information & Inspiration for Recovery & Healing from a 3-time Cancer Survivor.

Question and Answer updated by Jane Motler, MHCS, RDN, CSO on behalf of the ON DPG