

## supplements and cancer medication interactions

After a cancer diagnosis, many people turn to over-the-counter herbs and supplements because they are often viewed as a harmless way to improve health and feel better. However, there can be interactions between herbs and supplements and cancer treatments.

Supplements can interfere with cancer treatments in many ways. Certain supplements may interfere with chemotherapy drugs targeting cancer cells, while other supplements may affect how well cancer medications are processed in the body. [See the table below for common supplements and their potential interactions with cancer medications.](#)

Supplement	Possible Interaction
<b>Ascorbic Acid (Vitamin C)</b>	Reduces the activity of certain cancer medications
<b>Black Cohosh</b>	May increase the absorption and toxicity of tamoxifen
<b>CoQ10</b>	May disrupt the effectiveness of chemotherapy
<b>Echinacea</b>	May interfere with the effectiveness of immunotherapy
<b>Garlic</b>	May increase bleeding in cancer patients who are also taking blood thinners
<b>St. John's Wort</b>	May lower the amount of certain cancer medications absorbed by the body

Because supplements are seen as “natural” many people consider them safe. However, current research does not support the use of supplemental vitamins, minerals or herbs during cancer treatment. It's important to talk to your cancer care team about any dietary supplement(s) you are taking prior to beginning cancer treatment, and to discuss starting any new supplements during treatment.

**For more information on dietary supplements, see the resources below:**

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database:  
[naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com](http://naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com)

Oregon State University Linus Pauling Center for Micronutrient Research: [lpi.oregonstate.edu/mic](http://lpi.oregonstate.edu/mic)

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center:  
[mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/herbs-botanicals-other-products](http://mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/herbs-botanicals-other-products)

National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements: [ods.od.nih.gov](http://ods.od.nih.gov)

Instead of using supplements, most health care providers recommend getting vitamins, minerals and other nutrients from food, particularly plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based protein sources (nuts, beans, lentils, etc.). To feel better, focus on eating a healthy, balanced diet with foods from all food groups.