

Oncology Management Guidelines: Natural Health Products

Position Statement:

The use of natural health products during chemotherapy, cellular therapy (including bone marrow transplantation), or surgery is not recommended.

What are natural health products?

Natural health products are vitamins, minerals, herbs and other supplements that you take as a natural medicine to add to the nutrients you get from food. They are sometimes taken in higher amounts than you can get through your diet.

Are there natural health products that I can take during treatment?

A regular strength multi-vitamin and mineral supplement is acceptable. Select a brand that is specific to your age group. The supplement should contain small doses of a wide variety of nutrients, high doses are not recommended.

Why should I avoid taking natural health products during cancer treatment?

Your health care team cannot predict the effect of taking natural health products during cancer treatment. Chemotherapy drugs attack cancer cells in a variety of complex ways. Cancer therapies are developed to maximize damage to the cancer cells while minimizing damage to healthy cells. Natural health products could change this and prevent your treatment from achieving the desired effect, or increase side effects.

Natural Health products may affect the way your body handles chemotherapy drugs. For example, St. John's Wort reduces the amount of one chemotherapy drug in the blood by about half. As a result, fewer cancer cells may be destroyed.

Your health care team needs scientific proof to be sure that it is safe for you to take natural health products during cancer treatment. It is important to compare groups of people in a research study to find out the effects of taking natural health products during cancer therapy. At present, these studies are not generally

available, and the safety or benefit of taking natural health products during cancer treatment is unknown.

Should I be careful about the food I eat?

Food sources usually do not need to be restricted during cancer treatment. Your cancer care team will tell you if there are certain foods to avoid during treatment. There is not a special diet you need to follow while having cancer treatment.

For more information about eating well during cancer treatment, please ask to be referred to a registered dietitian at your cancer treatment centre.

You can also read the eating well during cancer treatment section of the NSHA Cancer Care Program's resource "Cancer Care: A Guide for Patients, Families and Caregivers" available at www.nscancercare.ca.

What about after treatment?

After you finish your treatment you may take natural health products. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or dietitian about the natural health products that may be helpful for you.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>



Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

Nova Scotia Health Authority

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.