

Antioxidant Supplements During Cancer Treatments

This handout offers information on the risk of taking antioxidant supplements during your cancer treatments (systemic or radiation therapy treatments). Antioxidants are nutrients found in some foods and in vitamin, mineral or other dietary supplements. Antioxidants help your body protect your cells from damage. They can also help your body repair damage to your cells. Antioxidants include vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene and selenium. Some people with cancer choose to take antioxidants in the form of vitamins, minerals or other dietary supplements hoping to:

- Boost their immune system
- Destroy cancer cells
- Reduce side effects of cancer treatment.

Do not take antioxidants in the form of vitamins, minerals or other dietary supplements:

- 1 week before you start your cancer treatments (if time allows you to do this)
- During your cancer treatments
- For 1 week after your last cancer treatment.

The goal of cancer treatments is to damage your cancer cells. If you take large amounts of antioxidant supplements during cancer treatments, you may protect the cancer cells. This may lessen the benefits of your cancer treatments. It is okay to take 1 multivitamin pill a day if it does not contain large amounts of antioxidants.

You do not need to limit any foods or fluids that naturally contain antioxidants, such as fruits and vegetables.

Talk to your oncologist or a registered dietitian in the cancer centre if you have questions about any of the information in this handout.

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