



## Use of Natural Health Products during Chemotherapy and Radiation Therapy

A joint recommendation on behalf of Supportive Care, Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, Nursing, Pharmacy and Nutrition of the Regional Cancer Centre

*The use of some Natural Health Products (NHPs) during active treatment such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy requires careful consideration.*

### What are Natural Health Products?

Natural Health Products are vitamins, minerals, herbs and other supplements that you take on a regular basis as a natural medicine in addition to what is obtained from food. These products are sold in liquid, pill, powder or capsule form and can be found in concentrations that far exceed what one would obtain through food sources.

### Why is careful consideration of NHPs required?

Caution is required when combining NHPs with your cancer treatment because the use of certain NHPs may reduce the effectiveness and safety of certain chemotherapies, radiation therapy and other prescribed medication associated with your treatment. Caution is also required because standards governing the products' ingredients and health claims may not be reliable.

### The Oncology Program Recommendations during Active Treatment

1. If you are considering taking an NHP and will be receiving active treatment such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, we recommend you discuss this with your health care team first.
2. If you are already taking an NHP, we recommend that you inform your health care team before beginning your cancer treatment. You may not be advised to discontinue use of some supplements during active treatment. Discuss with your health care team the most appropriate time to resume use of NHPs following completion of your active treatment.
3. We recommend that you maintain a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide. Consuming the recommended number of servings per day will provide you with the necessary nutrients.
4. If required, we recommend the use of a regular strength one a day multivitamin and mineral supplement appropriate for age.

These recommendations provide guidance on the use of NHPs during active treatment. Individual consultation with your healthcare team is available to address your questions or concerns. We are committed to helping you find information so you can make informed decisions.

# Reliable Sources of Information on Natural Health Products & Therapies

## Starting Point

1. National Institutes of Health [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)

**Use the search field on this site to locate the following:**

- National Library of Medicine  
Use the search field on this site to locate “Medline Plus”. View “Drugs and Supplements”. Browse by the product’s first letter.
- NCCAM (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine)  
Use the search field on this site to locate “Herbs at a Glance”.
- Office of Dietary Supplements  
*Click on Health Information*

2. Cancer Care Ontario [www.cancercare.on.ca](http://www.cancercare.on.ca)

**Use the search field on this site to locate “Position Paper on Complementary Therapies”**

3. National Cancer Institute [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**Use the search field on this site to locate the following publication:**

- Thinking about Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Guide for People with Cancer

4. Canadian Cancer Society [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

**Click on Support and Services, Publications, Complementary Therapies**

## Looking for Information about Your Specific Natural Health Products?

1. Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer

Centre [www.mskcc.org](http://www.mskcc.org)

Use the search field on this site to locate “About Herbs, Botanicals & Other Products”.

2. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer

Centre [www.mdanderson.org](http://www.mdanderson.org)

Use the search field on this site to locate “CIMER”

(Complementary/Integrative Medicine Education Resources)