

# Herbal Supplements and Breast Cancer

What are the most important things to know about herbal supplements?

**Herbal supplements include vitamins, minerals, botanicals, amino acids, and herbs.**

- Supplements can come in various forms including pills, tablets, powders, and topicals.
- Some common examples include black cohosh, ginseng, St. John's Wort, red clover, and turmeric, though there are hundreds commercially available.

**No herbal supplement can treat or cure cancer. Supplements should not be taken in place of approved treatments.**

- Certain supplements have been studied to see if there are any benefits, such as to help with inflammation or to boost immunity. While some supplements have shown benefit, there is often not enough evidence to say with certainty.
- Many supplements have not been studied at all. Others have been studied but have not been proven to show any benefit.
- Supplements should **never** be used in place of approved treatments or a clinical trial.

**Supplements are not reviewed and approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), so we do not know how safe they are or how well they work.**

- The FDA reviews and approves medications but not supplements. The FDA does not evaluate whether supplements can benefit a part of the body or how the body functions.
- Only products with a USP seal have been evaluated for quality standards set by the United States Pharmacopeia.

**There are many herbal supplements that you should not take if you have breast cancer because they can interfere with your treatment.**

Some common supplements can increase estrogen, which can affect how well your treatment works. **Small amounts used for cooking, such as spices and seasonings, or in creams or lotions applied to the skin, are often ok.**

**Do not take these supplements:**

If you are currently taking any of these supplements, talk with your treatment team about how to safely stop taking them.

Astragalus	Damiana	Kudzu	Resveratrol
Avlimil	DHEA	Maca	Schisandra
Black cohosh	Dong quai	Milk thistle	Soy supplements
Boron	Essiac	Black cumin	Turmeric
Bovine colostrum	Fenugreek	Quercetin	Valerian
Chasteberry	Ginseng	Red clover	Wild yam

**The American Society of Clinical Oncology (2018) provides some supplement guidance for breast cancer patients.**

- **Nausea:** After talking with your treatment team, you may be able to take ginger along with nausea medications to treat nausea.
- **Neuropathy:** Acetyl-L-carnitine should **not** be used to prevent peripheral neuropathy. It could cause harm.
- **Hot Flashes:** Soy supplements do not help with hot flashes and are therefore **not** recommended.

**You do not need to completely stop taking all supplements, but it is important that you talk to your treatment team:**

- about any supplements you are currently taking, in case they could cause harm or interact with your treatment
- before starting any new supplement
- before starting on a clinical trial

### **Herbal Supplements Resources**

**Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center – About Herbs:** <https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/herbs>

**Medline Herbs and Supplements:** [https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/herb\\_All.html](https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/herb_All.html)

**USP Verified Dietary Supplements:** <https://www.quality-supplements.org/verified-products>

