



What You Need to Know About Antioxidants When You Are Having Radiation or Systemic Therapy Treatments

What are antioxidants?

Antioxidants help protect our cells from damage. Antioxidants are found in some foods and in supplements such as pills and herbal products. Antioxidants include vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene and selenium.

How do antioxidants work?

Free oxygen radicals are made when your body produces oxygen to provide energy. These free oxygen radicals can cause damage to your cells that may result in cancer cells being formed. Antioxidants are thought to fight these free radicals in our bodies and may protect all of the cells in your body from damage.

Will taking extra antioxidants help me fight my cancer?

No, it will not help you fight your cancer. We recommend you **do not** take extra antioxidants when you are having radiation or systemic therapy treatments and up to one week after your final treatment. One of the ways these treatments work is to cause more damage to the free radicals in your cancer cells than in your healthy cells. If you take large amounts of antioxidants when you are having treatment, you may protect the cancer cells. This may lessen the effect of your treatment.

Is it okay to take a multivitamin when I am having radiation or systemic therapy treatments?

Yes, it is okay to take 1 multivitamin pill a day. It is important to take a multivitamin that does not have more than the daily recommended doses of vitamin C, vitamin E, and beta-carotene and selenium.

Eating a balanced diet

You can make sure that your body is getting the right amount of antioxidants during your treatment by eating a balanced diet that has some of the following foods:

Antioxidant	Foods to eat
Vitamin C	broccoli, brussel sprouts, cantaloupe, citrus fruits, citrus juices, cranberry juice, guava, kiwi, lychee nuts, mango, papaya, red peppers, strawberries
Vitamin E	brown rice, whole wheat, vegetable oils, nuts and seeds, green leafy vegetables, wheat germ
Beta-carotene	apricots, broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, papaya, spinach, sweet potatoes, winter squash
Selenium	brazil nuts, beef, whole grains, seafood, kidneys, liver, tuna, turkey

If you have questions about this information, talk to a member of your healthcare team. If you have questions about your diet, ask to talk to a dietitian.

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