

What You Need to Know About Taking Antioxidants During Your Radiation Therapy

What are antioxidants?

Antioxidants are nutrients found in some foods and also in supplements such as pills. Antioxidants help your body protect and repair your cells from damage to keep them working normally.

Should I take antioxidants during radiation therapy?

The goal of radiation therapy is to damage your cancer cells. Taking antioxidants may prevent your radiation treatment from working as well as it should because it may prevent some of the damage we are trying to cause to your cancer cells.

Do **NOT** take large amounts of antioxidants:

- **1 week before** your first radiation treatment (if time allows)
- **anytime while** you are on radiation treatment
- **1 week after** your last radiation treatment

Look at the side of your supplement or multivitamin bottle to check the amount of antioxidants in your pills. Do not use any supplement if you cannot see the amount of antioxidants in it.

Below is a table of safe amounts of antioxidants you can take while having radiation treatment.

Do not take more than the amount listed.

Name of antioxidant:	Do NOT take more than:
Vitamin C	90 mg per day (men) 75 mg per day (women)
Vitamin E (d-alpha-tocopherol)	22 IU per day
Synthetic Vitamin E (dl-alpha-tocopherol)	33 IU per day
Selenium	55 micrograms per day
Beta Carotene	Avoid because there is no safe level
Melatonin	Avoid because there is no safe level

IU = International Unit

What vitamins and supplements can I take?

Not all vitamin and mineral supplements have antioxidants. For example, calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B12 are not antioxidants. These vitamins and minerals are safe to take during your radiation treatment.

You should stop all combination supplements (such as prostate formula or tinctures) because of the different ingredients in them (extracts, roots, vitamins, minerals). It is also recommended to avoid taking Turmeric (curcumin) and Lutein supplements.

Talk with your doctor, pharmacist or dietician about what you can safely take during radiation treatment.

Can I eat foods with antioxidants in them?

Yes. Many foods have antioxidants, but the amount of antioxidants found in them is small enough that it will not affect your radiation treatment. Nutritional supplements such as Ensure[®] or Boost[®] are also considered safe.

Where can I get more information?

Talk to your radiation therapy team if you have questions about antioxidants and your treatment. Bring your antioxidant or vitamin supplement bottles with you to be sure they are safe to use.

*Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.
Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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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.
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