

## Breast Cancer: Precautions for Use of Dietary/Herbal Supplements

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**Tell your health care team if you use any herbs, supplements, vitamins, minerals or other remedies. Bring all of these with you to each doctor's appointment.**

Many dietary/herbal supplements and other natural medicines or products may be dangerous if used during your cancer treatment. It is important to know that if a supplement or product is labeled as “natural,” it does not mean it is safe or does not have harmful side effects. These supplements or products may interact with other medicines you take and can cause health problems such as bleeding, changes in your blood pressure or organ damage.

Limited information is available about some dietary/herbal supplements and natural medicines or products. Many of these products have not been tested in clinical studies in humans and the effects they may cause are unknown. **For these reasons, we recommend that you do not take dietary/herbal supplements or other natural products during your cancer treatment.** If you want to use dietary/herbal supplements, it is important to talk with your doctor or pharmacist before you take or use any supplements.

The following list includes supplements or products (pill or powder form) that can act like the hormone, estrogen, in your body and may cause problems with your breast cancer treatment or increase the risk of your breast cancer coming back. **Foods with these substances are normally not harmful, if taken in limited amounts as part of your regular diet.**

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

Aletris	Diindolylmethane (DIM)	Maca
Alfalfa	Dong Quai	Milk Thistle
Androstenediol	Fennel	Pseudoginseng (Panax)
Androstenedione	Flaxseed	Pregnenolone
Anise	Fo-Ti	Red Clover
Ashwaghandha	German Chamomile	Red Raspberry Leaf
Baikal Skullcap	Ginseng	Resveratrol
Black or Blue Cohosh	Grapefruit juice, more than 4 cups/day	Sage
Black Tea	Guggul	Saw Palmetto
Boron, more than 3mg/day	Isoflavones or plant estrogens (Daidzen, Genistein)	Scarlet Pimpernel
Bridelia	Hops	Star Anise
Chasteberry	Horny Goat Weed/ Barrenwort	Thyme
Deer Velvet	Hu Zhang	Turmeric *
Dandelion	Kudzu	Vitex Agnus-Castus
Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA)	Licorice	Wild Yam

\* Research shows that Turmeric has curcumin in it, which may act like an estrogen in your body. Other studies have found that turmeric may help fight cancer. Until more is known about turmeric, it is best to use caution with this type of supplement.

## Soy and Flax

Both soy and ground flax have substances that act like estrogen, called phytoestrogens. Foods with whole soy and ground flax are normally safe when eaten as part of your regular diet. Until more is known about the effects of soy and flax on breast cancer, we recommend that you do not use them in supplement (pill or powder form) or highly concentrated forms.

Foods that are **safe** to eat include:

- **Whole** soy food, such as soy milk, tofu, edamame, miso and soy sauce. It is safe to eat 2 to 3 servings of whole soy food each day.
- Ground flaxseed. It is safe to eat up to 4 tablespoons of ground flaxseed each day.
- Flaxseed oil. Flaxseed oil does not have phytoestrogens.

**Do not** eat processed foods that have concentrated forms of soy or flax. To tell if a processed food has concentrated amounts of soy or flax, look at the label. Soy or flax will be listed as one of the first 3 ingredients on the label. Concentrated amounts of soy may be found in protein powder, granola bars, health shakes and high-protein cereal. Concentrated soy may be listed on the food label as:

- Soy protein isolate
- Isolated soy protein
- Concentrated soy protein

Many dietary/herbal supplements and products used to treat menopause symptoms, such as hot flashes, have concentrated forms of soy or flax. **Do not** take soy or flax supplements. Flaxseed oil is okay to use. There may also be other precautions for supplement use that are not listed above. It is important to talk with your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian before you take any dietary/herbal supplement or to learn more about what foods are safe to eat.