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Cancer Center

[Make an Appointment](#)
[Back](#)

[Find a Physician](#) [Treatment](#)
[Search About MSK](#) [Learn About Cancer & Treatment](#)

ABOUT US

[Our mission, vision & core values](#)

[Leadership](#)

[History](#)

[Inclusion & belonging](#)

[Annual report](#)

[Give to MSK](#)

FOR THE MEDIA

Chitosan has been promoted for weight loss and for cholesterol reduction. However, there is not enough evidence to support these uses.

The main ingredient in chitosan (KY-to-san) is chitin, an extract from the shells of sea creatures such as shrimp, lobster, and clams. It can also come from the cell walls of [reishi mushrooms](#). Marketers promote chitosan as a weight-loss product, claiming it binds to fat and cholesterol to prevent their absorption. However, studies in people have found that chitosan did not increase levels of fat excreted. Other studies suggest it may help improve cholesterol levels. However, more trials are needed before definite conclusions can be drawn.

Chitosan is used as an ingredient in many medical-grade products including hydrogels and bandages to improve wound healing, as well as in dental applications. Scientists think it may enhance the process of new tissue formation.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- For weight loss

There is not enough evidence to support the use of chitosan alone without dietary changes or exercise for weight loss.

- To lower cholesterol

Some clinical trials support this use, but long-term effectiveness is unknown.

- Topically, for improved wound healing

Lab studies and a clinical trial support this use.

What are the side effects?

- Constipation

- Flatulence, gas

- Bloating, abdominal cramping

What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are allergic to shellfish or mushrooms: Chitosan comes from either of these sources.

- You are taking warfarin (Coumadin): A case report indicates that chitosan may increase the blood-thinning effects of this drug.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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