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Although sea cucumber has been used in traditional medicine for several conditions, studies in humans are lacking.

Sea cucumber is a marine invertebrate related to sea urchins and star fish. It is dried and used in soups and other dishes and is considered a delicacy in Asian countries. Sea cucumber is used in traditional Chinese medicine to treat fatigue, impotence, constipation, frequent urination, and joint pain. It is also a rich source of chondroitin sulfate, commonly used for arthritis.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Cancer treatment

Lab experiments suggest a saponin compound in sea cucumber may have antitumor properties, but it has not been studied in humans.

- Longevity

Sea cucumber is used in Chinese medicine to increase longevity, but there are no clinical data to

support this use.

- Impotence

Although sea cucumber is used in Chinese medicine to treat impotence, there are no clinical data to back this use.

- Joint pain

Sea cucumber is a rich source of chondroitin sulfate, which may be helpful for osteoarthritis.

- Frequent urination

Sea cucumber is used in Chinese medicine to treat urinary problems, but clinical data are lacking.

## What are the side effects?

Acute occupational exposure: 3 cases from workers processing sea cucumbers by hand caused skin, breathing, and eye irritation. These symptoms likely resulted from a compound that sea cucumbers use as a defense becoming airborne, and then inhaled or otherwise ingested by workers.

## What else do I need to know?

Do Not Take if:

- You are allergic to seafood.
- You are taking anticoagulants: The polysaccharides present in sea cucumber may increase the effects of anticoagulants, increasing the risk of bleeding.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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