

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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[Leadership](#)

[History](#)

[Equality, diversity & inclusion](#)

[Annual report](#)

[Give to MSK](#)

Carnitine is a chemical that your body makes to produce energy. It's also found in foods such as meat, dairy products, beans, and avocados.

You can also take carnitine supplements as pills or capsules.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Carnitine is used to treat:

- Heart disease
- Nerve pain from diabetes
- Insulin resistance, which can increase your blood sugar
- Fatigue (feeling more weak or tired than usual)
- Fatigue due to cancer treatments
- Male infertility

Carnitine also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

Carnitine that you get from food is safe. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking carnitine supplements. Supplements are stronger than the carnitine you get from food. They can also interact with some medications and affect how they work.

For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of using carnitine supplements may include:

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Heartburn
- Flu-like symptoms (such as a cough, fever, or chills)
- Headache
- Diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements)
- High blood pressure
- Body odor

What else do I need to know?

- Talk with your healthcare provider if you're taking blood thinners such as warfarin (Coumadin[®]), clopidogrel (Plavix[®]), apixaban (Eliquis[®]), or rivaroxaban (Xarelto[®]). Carnitine can increase your risk of bleeding.
- L-carnitine and acetyl-L-carnitine are not the same. Acetyl-L-carnitine can increase nerve pain caused by chemotherapy.

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.

Carnitine - Last updated on May 31, 2023



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