

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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FOR THE MEDIA

Germanium preparations should not be used even at low doses, as it can cause severe side effects and even death.

Germanium is a naturally occurring element. Trace amounts can be found in foods such as shiitake mushrooms, garlic, tuna, and tomato juice. However, it is not an essential nutrient for human health. Germanium was considered by some as an elixir in the 1970s and '80s for diseases such as cancer and AIDS.

Earlier lab experiments suggested it may act as an antioxidant, and a product derived from germanium had some anticancer activity in the lab. However, human studies showed it has adverse effects and is not suitable as a cancer treatment.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat arthritis

No scientific evidence supports this use.

- To treat cancer

Clinical trials do not support this use.

- To reduce side effects of cancer therapy

The status of a small trial of germanium to reduce fatigue in cancer patients is unknown and has not produced any results.

- To treat HIV and AIDS

No scientific evidence supports this use.

What are the side effects?

- Weight loss
- Nausea, vomiting
- Appetite loss
- Low blood count
- Fatigue
- Muscle weakness
- Numbness, burning, tingling
- Liver toxicity
- Kidney damage

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Because of the frequency of toxic side effects such as kidney, liver, and nerve damage, germanium supplements should not be used, even at low doses.

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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