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Livingston-Wheeler therapy has not been shown to treat cancer.

Livingston-Wheeler therapy is an alternative approach to cancer treatment that gained popularity from the 1970s to early 1990. It used several treatments to supposedly stimulate the immune system, including BCG vaccine and a vaccine made from the individual's own urine, a strict vegetarian diet, antioxidants, and detoxification via coffee enemas. Treatments were available at a clinic run by Virginia Livingston-Wheeler, a doctor who believed that cancer was caused by a bacterium called *Progenitor cryptocides*, which she claimed to have isolated from cancer tissues. Although a number of viruses and bacteria have been associated with various cancers, a link between the bacteria named by Livingston-Wheeler and cancer was never confirmed by independent researchers.

Experts have studied the strict vegetarian diets required by metabolic therapies like Livingston-Wheeler, and have concluded that they are deficient in important nutrients such as calcium, iron, vitamins D, vitamin B12, and protein. Such diets would be unsuitable for some cancer patients.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To treat cancer  
One study found similar survival rates between patients treated with the Livingston-Wheeler therapy and with conventional cancer therapies at a major hospital, but the patients using the Livingston-Wheeler therapy had more side effects and lower quality of life. No other studies support this use.
- To treat HIV and AIDS  
There are no studies to support this claim.

## What are the side effects?

- Nutrient deficiencies including deficiencies in calcium, vitamin B12, and protein; anemia and malabsorption could also result from metabolic diets.
- The autogenous vaccine that was part of Livingston-Wheeler therapy could cause malaise, aching, slight fever, and tenderness at the injection site.
- There have been a number of deaths associated with prolonged use of coffee enemas.

## What else do I need to know?

### Patient Warnings:

- In a 1990 position paper, the American Cancer Society urged cancer patients not to use these treatments, as no evidence supported their safety or effectiveness. In addition, although the Livingston-Wheeler diet was similar to recommendations made by the American Cancer Society, its nutrient deficits, especially for calcium, iron, vitamins D and B12, and protein, would be unsuitable for some cancer patients.

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](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

Livingston-Wheeler Therapy - Last updated on February 24, 2021

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