

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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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 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.

Sea Cucumber - Last updated on February 26, 2021

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