

# About Your Lymphovenous Bypass (LVB) Surgery for Lymphedema

This guide will help you get ready for your lymphovenous bypass (LVB) surgery at MSK. It will also help you know what to expect as you recover.

Use this guide as a source of information in the days leading up to your surgery. Bring it with you on the day of your surgery. You and your care team will use it as you learn more about your recovery.

## Your care team

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Your caregiver

Your caregiver will learn about your surgery with you. They'll also help you care for yourself while you're healing after surgery. Write their name below.

Caregiver: \_\_\_\_\_



Visit [www.msk.org/pe/lvb\\_lymphedema](http://www.msk.org/pe/lvb_lymphedema) to view this guide online.

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# About your LVB surgery

## About lymphedema

Lymphedema (LIM-fuh-DEE-muh) is swelling caused by a buildup of lymph fluid. Your limb (arm or leg) with lymphedema is called your affected limb.

Sometimes, lymphedema happens when lymph nodes are taken out during surgery. Lymphedema also happens when lymphatic vessels (thin tubes that carry lymph fluid) become blocked by scar tissue after surgery. LVB surgery can be done to help treat lymphedema caused by blocked lymphatic vessels.

To learn more about lymphedema, you can also read the New York State Department of Health's resource *Understanding Lymphedema*. You can find it at [www.health.ny.gov/publications/0399](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/0399)

## About LVB surgery

LVB surgery is sometimes called lymphovenous anastomosis (LVA) surgery.

During your LVB surgery, your surgeon will use a microscope and small surgical tools to connect the part of your lymphatic vessel that's not blocked to a nearby vein (see Figure 1). This lets your lymphatic fluid get past the blockage and flow away from your affected limb.

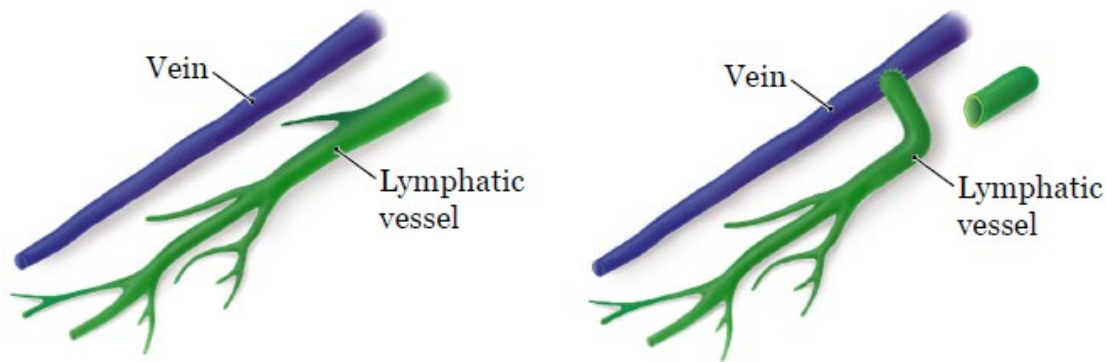


Figure 1. Rerouting a blocked lymphatic vessel

It's very hard to know how much change you may have after your surgery. You may be able to see less swelling. Your affected limb may feel different. Or, you may notice other small changes (such as your jewelry fitting differently).

Different people will have different results. Your surgeon will talk with you about what to expect after surgery. Some people notice changes right away. Other people do not notice any change for up to a year after their surgery.

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# Before your LVB surgery

This section will help you get ready for your surgery. Read it when your surgery is scheduled. Refer to it as your surgery gets closer. It has important information about what to do to get ready.



As you read this section, write down questions to ask your healthcare provider. You can use the space below.

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# Getting ready for your surgery

You and your care team will work together to get ready for your surgery. Help us keep you safe by telling us if any of these things apply to you, even if you're not sure.

- I take any prescription medicines. A prescription medicine is one you can only get with a prescription from a healthcare provider. Examples include:

- Medicines you swallow.
- Medicines you take as an injection (shot).
- Medicines you inhale (breathe in).
- Medicines you put on your skin as a patch or cream.

- I take any over-the-counter medicines, including patches and creams. An over-the-counter medicine is one you can buy without a prescription.

**Always be sure your healthcare providers know all the medicines and supplements you're taking.**

You may need to follow special instructions before surgery based on the medicines and supplements you take. If you do not follow those instructions, your surgery may be delayed or canceled.

- I take any dietary supplements, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, or natural or home remedies.
- I have a pacemaker, automatic implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (AICD), or other heart device.
- I have had a problem with anesthesia (A-nes-THEE-zhuh) in the past. Anesthesia is medicine to make you sleep during a surgery or procedure.
- I'm allergic to certain medicines or materials, including latex.
- I'm not willing to receive a blood transfusion.

- I use recreational drugs, such as marijuana.

## About drinking alcohol

It's important to talk with your healthcare providers about how much alcohol you drink. This will help us plan your care.

If you drink alcohol regularly, you may be at risk for problems during and after your surgery. These include bleeding, infections, heart problems, and a longer hospital stay.

If you drink alcohol regularly and stop suddenly, it can cause seizures, delirium, and death. If we know you're at risk for these problems, we can prescribe medicine to help prevent them.

Here are things you can do before surgery to keep from having problems.

- Be honest with us about how much alcohol you drink.
- Try to stop drinking alcohol once your surgery is planned. Tell us right away if you:
  - Get a headache.
  - Feel nauseous (like you're going to throw up).
  - Feel more anxious (nervous or worried) than usual.
  - Cannot sleep.

These are early signs of alcohol withdrawal and can be treated.

- Tell us if you cannot stop drinking.
- Ask us questions about drinking and surgery. We will keep all your medical information private, as always.

## About smoking

If you smoke or use an electronic smoking device, you can have breathing problems when you have surgery. Vapes and e-cigarettes are examples of electronic smoking devices. Stopping for even a few days before surgery can help prevent breathing problems during and after surgery.

We will refer you to our Tobacco Treatment Program if you smoke. You can also reach the program by calling 212-610-0507. To learn more, visit [www.msk.org/tobacco](http://www.msk.org/tobacco)

## About sleep apnea

Sleep apnea is a common breathing problem. If you have sleep apnea, you stop breathing for short lengths of time while you're asleep. The most common type is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). With OSA, your airway becomes fully blocked during sleep.

OSA can cause serious problems during and after surgery. Tell us if you have or think you might have sleep apnea. If you use a breathing device, such as a CPAP machine, bring it on the day of your surgery.

## Using MSK MyChart

MSK MyChart ([mskmychart.mskcc.org](http://mskmychart.mskcc.org)) is MSK's patient portal. You can use it to send and read messages from your care team, view your test results, see your appointment dates and times, and more. You can also invite your caregiver to make their own account so they can see information about your care.

If you do not have an MSK MyChart account, you can sign up at [mskmychart.mskcc.org](http://mskmychart.mskcc.org). You can also ask a member of your care team to send you an invitation.



If you need help with your account, call the MSK MyChart Help Desk at 646-227-2593. They are available Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Eastern time).

## Within 30 days of your surgery



### See a lymphedema therapist

**Before your LVB surgery, you need to have regular appointments with a certified lymphedema therapist.**

A lymphedema therapist is a physical or occupational therapist who has special training in treating lymphedema. They will work with you to reduce the swelling in your affected limb before your surgery.

## Presurgical testing (PST)

You'll have a PST appointment before your surgery. You'll get a reminder from your surgeon's office with the appointment date, time, and location. Visit [www.msk.org/parking](http://www.msk.org/parking) for parking information and directions to all MSK locations.

You can eat and take your usual medicines the day of your appointment.

It's helpful to bring these things to your appointment:

- A list of all the medicines you're taking, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, patches, and creams.
- Results of any medical tests done outside of MSK in the past year, if you have them. Examples include results from a cardiac stress test, echocardiogram, or carotid doppler study.
- The names and telephone numbers of your healthcare providers.

You'll meet with an advance practice provider (APP) during your PST appointment. They work closely with MSK's anesthesiology (A-nes-THEE-zee-AH-loh-jee) staff. These are doctors with special training in using anesthesia during a surgery or procedure.

Your APP will review your medical and surgical history with you. You may have tests to plan your care, such as:

- An electrocardiogram (EKG) to check your heart rhythm.
- A chest X-ray.
- Blood tests.

Your APP may recommend you see other healthcare providers. They'll also talk with you about which medicines to take the morning of your surgery.

## Identify your caregiver

Your caregiver has an important role in your care. Before your surgery, you and your caregiver will learn about your surgery from your healthcare providers. After your surgery, your caregiver will take you home when you're discharged. They'll also help you care for yourself at home.



### For caregivers

Caring for a person going through cancer treatment comes with many responsibilities. We offer resources and support to help you manage them.

Visit [www.msk.org/caregivers](http://www.msk.org/caregivers) or read *A Guide for Caregivers* to learn more. You can ask for a printed copy or find it at [www.msk.org/pe/guide\\_caregivers](http://www.msk.org/pe/guide_caregivers)

## Arrange for someone to take you home

You must have a responsible care partner take you home after your surgery. A responsible care partner is someone who can help you get home safely. They should be able to contact your care team if they have any concerns. Make sure to plan this before the day of your surgery.

If you don't have a responsible care partner to take you home, call one of the agencies below. They'll send someone to go home with you. There's a charge for this service, and you'll need to provide transportation. It's OK to use a taxi or car service, but you still need a responsible care partner with you.

### Agencies in New York

VNS Health: 888-735-8913

Caring People: 877-227-4649

### Agencies in New Jersey

Caring People: 877-227-4649

## Fill out a Health Care Proxy form

If you have not already filled out a Health Care Proxy form, we recommend you do now. If you already filled one out or have any other advance directives, bring them to your next appointment.

A health care proxy is a legal document. It says who will speak for you if you can't communicate for yourself. This person is called your health care agent.

- To learn about health care proxies and other advance directives, read *Advance Care Planning for People With Cancer and Their Loved Ones*. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/advance\\_care\\_planning](http://www.msk.org/pe/advance_care_planning) or ask for a printed copy.
- To learn about being a health care agent, read *How to Be a Health Care Agent*. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/health\\_care\\_agent](http://www.msk.org/pe/health_care_agent) or ask for a printed copy.

Talk with a member of your care team if you have questions about filling out a Health Care Proxy form.

## **Do physical activity**

Doing physical activity will help your body get into its best condition for your surgery. It will also make your recovery faster and easier.

Try to do physical activity every day. Any activity that makes your heart beat faster, such as walking, swimming, or biking, is a good choice. If it's cold outside, use stairs in your home or go to a mall or shopping center.

## **Follow a healthy diet**

Follow a well-balanced, healthy diet before your surgery. If you need help with your diet, talk with your healthcare provider about meeting with a clinical dietitian nutritionist.

## **Buy a 4% chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) solution antiseptic skin cleanser, such as Hibiclens®**

4% CHG solution is a skin cleanser that kills germs for 24 hours after you use it. Showering with it before your surgery will help lower your risk of infection after surgery. You can buy a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser at your local pharmacy without a prescription.

## 7 days before your surgery

### Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking aspirin

Aspirin can cause bleeding. If you take aspirin or a medicine that has aspirin, you may need to change your dose or stop taking it 7 days before your surgery. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. **Do not stop taking aspirin unless they tell you to.**

To learn more, read *How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

### Stop taking vitamin E, multivitamins, herbal remedies, and other dietary supplements

Vitamin E, multivitamins, herbal remedies, and other dietary supplements can cause bleeding. Stop taking them 7 days before your surgery. If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.

To learn more, read *Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

## 2 days before your surgery

### Stop taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen (Advil® and Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®), can cause bleeding. Stop taking them 2 days before your surgery. If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.

To learn more, read *How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil*. You can find it in the “Educational resources” section of this guide.

## 1 day before your surgery

### Note the time of your surgery

A staff member will call you after 2 p.m. the day before your surgery. If your surgery is scheduled for a Monday, they'll call you the Friday before. If you do not get a call by 7 p.m., call 212-639-5014.

The staff member will tell you what time to get to the hospital for your surgery. They'll also remind you where to go.

Visit [www.msk.org/parking](http://www.msk.org/parking) for parking information and directions to all MSK locations.

## **Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser, such as Hibiclens**

Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser before you go to bed the night before your surgery.

1. Wash your hair with your usual shampoo and conditioner. Rinse your head well.
2. Wash your face and genital (groin) area with your usual soap. Rinse your body well with warm water.
3. Open the 4% CHG solution bottle. Pour some into your hand or a clean washcloth.
4. Move away from the shower stream. Rub the 4% CHG solution gently over your body from your neck to your feet. Do not put it on your face or genital area.
5. Move back into the shower stream to rinse off the 4% CHG solution. Use warm water.
6. Dry yourself off with a clean towel.

Do not put on any lotion, cream, deodorant, makeup, powder, perfume, or cologne after your shower.

## **Instructions for eating**



**Stop eating at midnight (12 a.m.) the night before your surgery.** This includes hard candy and gum.

Your healthcare provider may have given you different instructions for when to stop eating. If so, follow their instructions. Some people need to fast (not eat) for longer before their surgery.

# The day of your surgery

## Instructions for drinking

Between midnight (12 a.m.) and 2 hours before your arrival time, only drink the liquids on the list below. Do not eat or drink anything else. Stop drinking 2 hours before your arrival time.

- Water.
- Clear apple juice, clear grape juice, or clear cranberry juice.
- Gatorade or Powerade.
- Black coffee or plain tea. It's OK to add sugar. Do not add anything else.
  - Do not add any amount of any type of milk or creamer. This includes plant-based milks and creamers.
  - Do not add honey.
  - Do not add flavored syrup.

If you have diabetes, pay attention to the amount of sugar in your drinks. It will be easier to control your blood sugar levels if you include sugar-free, low-sugar, or no added sugar versions of these drinks.

It's helpful to stay hydrated before surgery, so drink if you are thirsty. Do not drink more than you need. You will get intravenous (IV) fluids during your surgery.



**Stop drinking 2 hours before your arrival time.** This includes water.

Your healthcare provider may have given you different instructions for when to stop drinking. If so, follow their instructions.



## **Take your medicines as instructed**

A member of your care team will tell you which medicines to take the morning of your surgery. Take only those medicines with a sip of water. Depending on what you usually take, this may be all, some, or none of your usual morning medicines.

## **Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser, such as Hibiclens**

Shower with a 4% CHG solution antiseptic skin cleanser before you leave for the hospital. Use it the same way you did the night before.

Do not put on any lotion, cream, deodorant, makeup, powder, perfume, or cologne after your shower.

## **Things to remember**

- Wear something comfortable and loose-fitting.
- If you wear contact lenses, wear your glasses instead. Wearing contact lenses during surgery can damage your eyes.
- Do not wear any metal objects. Take off all jewelry, including body piercings. The tools used during your surgery can cause burns if they touch metal.
- Leave valuable items at home.
- If you're menstruating (have your monthly period), use a sanitary pad, not a tampon. We'll give you disposable underwear and a pad if you need them.

## What to bring

- Your breathing device for sleep apnea (such as your CPAP machine), if you have one.
- Your Health Care Proxy form and other advance directives, if you filled them out.
- Your cell phone and charger.
- Only the money you may want for small purchases, such as a newspaper.
- A case for your personal items, if you have any. Eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, prosthetic devices, wigs, and religious articles are examples of personal items.
- This guide. You'll use it to learn how to care for yourself after surgery.

## Once you're in the hospital

Many staff members will ask you to say and spell your name and birth date. This is for your safety. People with the same or a similar name may be having surgery on the same day.

We'll give you a hospital gown, robe, and nonskid socks to wear when it's time to change for surgery.

## Meet with a nurse

You'll meet with a nurse before surgery. Tell them the dose of any medicines you took after midnight (12 a.m.) and the time you took them. Make sure to include prescription and over-the-counter medicines, patches, and creams.

Your nurse may place an IV line in one of your veins, usually in your arm or hand. If your nurse does not place the IV, your anesthesiologist (A-nes-THEE-zee-AH-loh-jist) will do it in the operating room.

## **Meet with an anesthesiologist**

You'll also meet with an anesthesiologist before surgery. They will:

- Review your medical history with you.
- Ask if you've had any problems with anesthesia in the past, such as nausea or pain.
- Talk with you about your comfort and safety during your surgery.
- Talk with you about the kind of anesthesia you'll get.
- Answer your questions about your anesthesia.

## **Get ready for surgery**

When it's time for your surgery, you'll take off your eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, prosthetic devices, wig, and religious articles.

You'll either walk into the operating room or a staff member will bring you there on a stretcher. A member of the operating room team will help you onto the operating bed. They may put compression boots on your lower legs. These gently inflate and deflate to help blood flow in your legs. If your surgery is on one of your legs, that leg will not have a boot on it.

Once you're comfortable, your anesthesiologist will give you anesthesia through your IV line and you'll fall asleep. You'll also get fluids through your IV line during and after your surgery.

## During your surgery

After you're fully asleep, your care team will place a breathing tube through your mouth into your airway. It will help you breathe.

First, your surgeon will inject (give you a shot of) green dye between the fingers or toes on your affected limb. The dye will travel through your lymphatic vessels so it's easier for your surgeon to see them.

After your surgeon injects the dye, they'll make about 1 to 5 small incisions (surgical cuts) on your affected limb. Each incision will be about 2 centimeters ( $\frac{3}{4}$  inch) long. They'll use each incision to connect a lymphatic vessel to a nearby vein.

Your surgeon will close your incisions with stitches once they finish your surgery. They'll cover your incisions with a bandage.

Your care team will usually take out your breathing tube while you're still in the operating room.

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# After your LVB surgery

This section will help you know what to expect after your surgery. You'll learn how to safely recover from your surgery both in the hospital and at home.



As you read this section, write down questions to ask your healthcare provider. You can use the space below.

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# **In the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) or recovery room**

You'll be in the PACU or your recovery room when you wake up after your surgery. A nurse will be keeping track of your temperature, pulse, blood pressure, and oxygen levels. You may get oxygen through a tube resting below your nose or a mask over your nose and mouth. You may also have compression boots on one or both of your lower legs.

You might have tiny green marks on your affected limb. These are from the dye used during your surgery. They'll go away in about 1 week.

## **What to expect**

The length of time you're in the hospital after your surgery depends on your recovery. Most people are discharged from the hospital the same day as their surgery.

After your surgery, your healthcare provider will help you get ready to go home. When you're awake, your healthcare provider will:

- Encourage you to walk. If you had surgery on one of your legs, you can walk on your affected leg right away after your surgery.
- Give you something to eat and drink.
- Review your discharge instructions with you and your caregiver.
- Answer any questions you have.

## **Managing your pain**

Most people have very little pain after LVB surgery. If you have pain, tell your healthcare provider. They may give you pain medicine to help manage it.

## Leaving the hospital

Before you leave, look at your incisions with one of your healthcare providers. Knowing what your incisions look like will help you notice any changes later.

Your healthcare provider will write your discharge order before you leave. You'll also get written discharge instructions. One of your healthcare providers will review them with you before you leave.

If your ride isn't at the hospital when you're ready to leave, you may be able to wait in the Patient Transition Lounge. A member of your care team will give you more information.

## At home

Read *What You Can Do to Avoid Falling* to learn what you can do to keep from falling at home and during your appointments at MSK. You can find it at [www.msk.org/pe/avoid\\_falling](http://www.msk.org/pe/avoid_falling) or ask for a printed copy.

## Managing your pain

You may have some pain or discomfort when you go home. Some people have soreness, tightness, or muscle aches around their incisions. This doesn't mean something is wrong.

Follow these guidelines to help manage your pain at home.

- If your healthcare provider gave you pain medicine, take it as directed and as needed.
- Call your healthcare provider if the pain medicine they gave you does not help your pain.

- Do not drive or drink alcohol while you're taking pain medicine. Some pain medicines can make you drowsy (very sleepy). Alcohol can make the drowsiness worse.
- You'll have less pain as your incisions heal. An over-the-counter pain reliever will help with aches and discomfort. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) are examples of over-the-counter pain relievers.
  - Do not take too much of any medicine. Follow the instructions on the label or from your healthcare provider.
  - Read the labels on all the medicines you're taking. This is very important if you're taking acetaminophen. Acetaminophen is an ingredient in many over-the-counter and prescription medicines. Taking too much can harm your liver. Do not take more than one medicine that has acetaminophen without talking with a member of your care team.

Some pain medicines and over-the-counter pain relievers may cause constipation. Constipation is when you poop less often than usual, have a harder time pooping, or both.

## **Preventing and managing constipation**

Talk with your healthcare provider about how to prevent and manage constipation. You can also follow these guidelines.

- Go to the bathroom at the same time every day. Your body will get used to going at that time. But if you feel like you need to go, don't put it off.
- Try to use the bathroom 5 to 15 minutes after meals. After breakfast is a good time to go. That's when the reflexes in your colon are strongest.
- Exercise, if you can. Walking is a great type of exercise that can help prevent and manage constipation.



- Drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) cups (2 liters) of liquids daily, if you can. Choose water, juices (such as prune juice), soups, and milkshakes. Limit liquids with caffeine, such as coffee and soda. Caffeine can pull fluid out of your body.
- Slowly increase the fiber in your diet to 25 to 35 grams per day. Unpeeled fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and cereals contain fiber. If you have an ostomy or recently had bowel surgery, ask your healthcare provider before changing your diet.
- Both over-the-counter and prescription medicines can treat constipation. Ask your healthcare provider before taking any medicine for constipation. This is very important if you have an ostomy or have had bowel surgery. Follow the instructions on the label or from your healthcare provider. Examples of over-the-counter medicines for constipation are:
  - Docusate sodium (Colace®). This is a stool softener (medicine that makes your bowel movements softer) that causes few side effects. You can use it to help prevent constipation. Do not take it with mineral oil.
  - Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®). This is a laxative (medicine that causes bowel movements) that causes few side effects. Take it with 8 ounces (1 cup) of a liquid. Only take it if you're already constipated.
  - Senna (Senokot®). This is a stimulant laxative, which can cause cramping. It's best to take it at bedtime. Only take it if you're already constipated.

If any of these medicines cause diarrhea (loose, watery bowel movements), stop taking them. You can start again if you need to.

## Caring for your incisions

Do not shower or get your incisions wet for the first 48 hours (2 days) after your surgery. Follow the instructions in the “Showering” section.

Change your bandages once a day for the first 48 hours after your surgery.

It’s common for the skin below your incisions to feel numb. The numbness will go away over time.

Call your healthcare provider’s office if:

- The skin around your incisions is very red or getting more red.
- The skin around your incisions is warmer than usual.
- The area around your incisions is starting to swell or getting more swollen.
- You see drainage that looks like pus (thick and milky).
- Your incisions smell bad.

If you go home with stitches in your incisions, your healthcare provider will take them out about 2 weeks after your surgery.

## Showering

Do not shower or get your incisions wet for the first 48 hours after your surgery.

After 48 hours, you can shower as usual. Let the water run over your incisions when you shower. If you have stitches in your incisions, it’s OK to get them wet.

Take your bandages off before you shower. Use soap during your shower, but do not put it directly on your incisions. Do not scrub over your incisions.

After you shower, pat the area around your incisions dry with a clean towel. If your clothing may rub your incisions, cover them with a small bandage. Otherwise, leave them uncovered.

Do not take a bath for the first 6 weeks after your surgery.

## Caring for your affected limb

It's important to take good care of your affected limb to help it heal. The instructions below are general. If your surgeon gives you different instructions, follow those instead. If you have any questions, call your surgeon's office.

Avoid putting pressure on or near your incisions until your surgeon tells you it's OK. For example, avoid sleeping on your affected side and do not wear tight clothing.

Treatment for your affected limb can include:

### Compression

Compression (squeezing) helps move lymphatic fluid out of a swollen area. Compression options include:

- **Elastic (stretchy) garments.** These are pieces of clothing that compress (squeeze) part of your body. They're sometimes called lymphedema sleeves or lymphedema stockings.
- **Short-stretch compression bandages.** These are special bandages that gently compress part of your body. They're not the same as a bandage you would use for a joint strain or sprain. They're sometimes called lymphedema wraps.
- **Other inelastic (not stretchy) compression garments.** These fit a little more loosely and apply less pressure than other compression options. They're most often used at night.

- **A pneumatic (noo-MA-tik) pressure pump.** This is a special sleeve, stocking, or vest that attaches to a pump. The pump inflates and deflates the sleeve, stocking, or vest to compress an area. It's sometimes called a lymphedema pump.

Your lymphedema therapist will talk with you about the best option for you.

## **Manual lymphatic drainage**

Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) is a gentle form of massage for your lymphatic system. It may help move lymph fluid out of a swollen area. If you have questions about MLD or massage, talk with your lymphedema therapist.

## **When you get home from the hospital and for the first 2 weeks after your surgery:**

- You can use a compression sleeve, stocking, wrap, or garment on your affected limb.
- Avoid putting direct pressure on your incisions. If you have a pneumatic pressure device or pump, do not use it at this time.
- Do not visit your lymphedema therapist, physical therapist, or occupational therapist.
- Do not lift, push, or pull anything heavier than 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms). A gallon of milk is about 8 pounds (3.3 kilograms). You'll need help with things like doing laundry and carrying groceries.
- Keep your affected limb elevated as often as you can. It's best to rest your limb on 2 pillows while you're sitting or sleeping, if you can. This will help prevent swelling.

## **Starting 2 weeks after your surgery:**

- Keep using a compression sleeve, stocking, wrap, or garment on your affected limb.

- Continue to avoid putting direct pressure on your incisions. If you have a pneumatic pressure device or pump, do not use it at this time.
- You can start performing manual lymphatic drainage (MLD), but do not massage over your incisions.
- You can start visiting your lymphedema therapist, physical therapist, or occupational therapist again.
- Keep following the same lifting, pushing, and pulling restrictions (rules). Do not lift, push, or pull anything heavier than 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms).

### **Starting 4 weeks after your surgery:**

- Keep using a compression sleeve, stocking, wrap, or garment on your affected limb.
- Keep performing MLD. You can start massaging over your incisions.
- If you have a pneumatic pressure device or pump, you can start using it again.
- You do not need to keep following any lifting, pushing, or pulling restrictions. You can go back to all your usual activities.

## **Eating and drinking**

You can eat all the foods you did before your surgery, unless your healthcare provider gives you other instructions. Eating a balanced diet with lots of calories and protein will help you heal after surgery. Try to eat a good protein source (such as meat, fish, or eggs) at each meal. You should also try to eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

It's also important to drink plenty of liquids. Try to drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) cups of liquids every day. Choose liquids without alcohol. Limit liquids with caffeine.

If you have questions about your diet, ask to see a clinical dietitian nutritionist.

## **Driving**

Ask your healthcare provider when you can drive. Most people can start driving again when they get home from the hospital. Do not drive while you're taking pain medicine that may make you drowsy.

You can ride in a car as a passenger at any time after you leave the hospital.

## **Going back to work**

Talk with your healthcare provider about your job. They'll tell you when it may be safe for you to start working again based on what you do. If you move around a lot or lift heavy objects, you may need to stay out a little longer. If you sit at a desk, you may be able to go back sooner.

## **Traveling**

You can travel 2 weeks after your surgery. Bring your compression sleeve, stocking, wrap, or garment with you. If you're traveling by plane, wear it on the flight.

## **Managing your feelings**

You may have new and upsetting feelings after a surgery for a serious illness. Many people say they felt weepy, sad, worried, nervous, irritable, or angry at one time or another. You may find that you cannot control some of these feelings. If this happens, it's a good idea to seek emotional support. Your healthcare provider can refer you to MSK's Counseling Center. You can also reach them by calling 646-888-0200.

The first step in coping is to talk about how you feel. Family and friends can help. We can also reassure, support, and guide you. It's always a good idea to let us know how you, your family, and your friends are feeling emotionally. Many resources are available to you and your family.

We're here to help you and your family and friends handle the emotional aspects of your illness. We can help no matter if you're in the hospital or at home.

## When to call your healthcare provider



Call your healthcare provider if:

- You have a fever of 100.5 °F (38 °C) or higher.
- The skin around your incisions is very red or getting more red.
- The skin around your incisions is warmer than usual.
- The area around your incisions is starting to swell or getting more swollen.
- There's new drainage (liquid) coming from your incisions.
- You see drainage that looks like pus (thick and milky).
- Your incisions smell bad.
- You have any questions or concerns.

## Contact information

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.





# Support services

This section has a list of support services. They may help you as you get ready for your surgery and recover after your surgery.



As you read this section, write down questions to ask your healthcare provider. You can use the space below.

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# **MSK support services**

## **Admitting Office**

212-639-7606

Call if you have questions about your hospital admission, such as asking for a private room.

## **Anesthesia**

212-639-6840

Call if you have questions about anesthesia.

## **Blood Donor Room**

212-639-7643

Call for information if you're interested in donating blood or platelets.

## **Bobst International Center**

[www.msk.org/international](http://www.msk.org/international)

888-675-7722

We welcome patients from around the world and offer many services to help. If you're an international patient, call for help arranging your care.

## **Counseling Center**

[www.msk.org/counseling](http://www.msk.org/counseling)

646-888-0200

Many people find that counseling helps them. Our Counseling Center offers counseling for individuals, couples, families, and groups. We can also prescribe medicine to help if you feel anxious or depressed. Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call the number above to make an appointment.

## **Food Pantry Program**

646-888-8055

We give food to people in need during their cancer treatment. Talk with a member of your care team or call the number above to learn more.

## **Integrative Medicine Service**

[www.msk.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.msk.org/integrativemedicine)

Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care. For example, we offer music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Call 646-449-1010 to make an appointment for these services.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine Service. They'll work with you to make a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. Call 646-608-8550 to make an appointment for a consultation.

## **MSK Library**

[library.mskcc.org](http://library.mskcc.org)

212-639-7439

You can visit our library website or call to talk with the library reference staff. They can help you find more information about a type of cancer. You can also visit the library's Patient and Health Care Consumer Education Guide at [libguides.mskcc.org/patienteducation](http://libguides.mskcc.org/patienteducation)

## **Nutrition Services**

[www.msk.org/nutrition](http://www.msk.org/nutrition)

212-639-7312

Our Nutrition Service offers nutritional counseling with one of our clinical dietitian nutritionists. Your clinical dietitian nutritionist will talk with you about your eating habits. They can also give advice on what to eat during and after treatment. Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call the number above to make an appointment.

## **Patient and Community Education**

[www.msk.org/pe](http://www.msk.org/pe)

Visit our patient and community education website to search for educational resources, videos, and online programs.

**Patient Billing**

646-227-3378

Call if you have questions about preauthorization with your insurance company. This is also called preapproval.

**Patient Representative Office**

212-639-7202

Call if you have questions about the Health Care Proxy form or concerns about your care.

**Perioperative Nurse Liaison**

212-639-5935

Call if you have questions about MSK releasing any information while you're having surgery.

**Private Duty Nurses and Companions**

917-862-6373

You can request private nurses or companions to care for you in the hospital and at home. Call to learn more.

**Rehabilitation Services**

[www.msk.org/rehabilitation](http://www.msk.org/rehabilitation)

Cancers and cancer treatments can make your body feel weak, stiff, or tight. Some can cause lymphedema (swelling). Our physiatrists (rehabilitation medicine doctors), occupational therapists (OTs), and physical therapists (PTs) can help you get back to your usual activities.

- **Rehabilitation medicine doctors** diagnose and treat problems that affect how you move and do activities. They can design and help coordinate your rehabilitation therapy program, either at MSK or somewhere closer to home. Call Rehabilitation Medicine (Physiatry) at 646-888-1929 to learn more.
- An **OT** can help if you're having trouble doing usual daily activities. For example, they can recommend tools to help make daily tasks easier.

A **PT** can teach you exercises to help build strength and flexibility. Call Rehabilitation Therapy at 646-888-1900 to learn more.

### **Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) Program**

646-888-8106

At MSK, care does not end after your treatment. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment.

This program has many services. We offer seminars, workshops, support groups, and counseling on life after treatment. We can also help with insurance and employment issues.

### **Sexual Health Programs**

Cancer and cancer treatments can affect your sexual health, fertility, or both. MSK's sexual health programs can help you before, during, or after your treatment.

- Our **Female Sexual Medicine and Women's Health Program** can help with sexual health problems such as premature menopause or fertility issues. Ask a member of your MSK care team for a referral or call 646-888-5076 to learn more.
- Our **Male Sexual and Reproductive Medicine Program** can help with sexual health problems such as erectile dysfunction (ED). Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call 646-888-6024 to learn more.

### **Social Work**

[www.msk.org/socialwork](http://www.msk.org/socialwork)

212-639-7020

Social workers help patients, families, and friends deal with common issues for people who have cancer. They provide individual counseling and support groups throughout your treatment. They can help you communicate with children and other family members.

Our social workers can also help refer you to community agencies and programs. If you're having trouble paying your bills, they also have information about financial resources. Call the number above to learn more.

### **Spiritual Care**

212-639-5982

Our chaplains (spiritual counselors) are available to listen, help support family members, and pray. They can contact community clergy or faith groups, or simply be a comforting companion and a spiritual presence. Anyone can ask for spiritual support. You do not have to have a religious affiliation (connection to a religion).

MSK's interfaith chapel is located near Memorial Hospital's main lobby. It's open 24 hours a day. If you have an emergency, call 212-639-2000. Ask for the chaplain on call.

### **Tobacco Treatment Program**

[www.msk.org/tobacco](http://www.msk.org/tobacco)

212-610-0507

If you want to quit smoking, MSK has specialists who can help. Call to learn more.

### **Virtual Programs**

[www.msk.org/vp](http://www.msk.org/vp)

We offer online education and support for patients and caregivers. These are live sessions where you can talk or just listen. You can learn about your diagnosis, what to expect during treatment, and how to prepare for your cancer care.

Sessions are private, free, and led by experts. Visit our website to learn more about Virtual Programs or to register.

# External support services

There are many other services available to help you before, during, and after your cancer treatment. Some offer support groups and information. Others can help with transportation, lodging, and treatment costs.

Visit [www.msk.org/pe/external\\_support\\_services](http://www.msk.org/pe/external_support_services) for a list of these support services. You can also call 212-639-7020 to talk with an MSK social worker.

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# Educational resources

This section lists the educational resources mentioned in this guide. It also has copies of the resources that are most important for you to read. They will help you get ready for your surgery and recover after your surgery.



As you read these resources, write down questions to ask your healthcare provider. You can use the space below.

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These are the educational resources mentioned in this guide. You can find them online or ask a member of your care team for a printed copy.

- ***A Guide for Caregivers*** ([www.msk.org/pe/guide\\_caregivers](http://www.msk.org/pe/guide_caregivers))
- ***Advance Care Planning for People With Cancer and Their Loved Ones*** ([www.msk.org/pe/advance\\_care\\_planning](http://www.msk.org/pe/advance_care_planning))
- ***Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment*** ([www.msk.org/pe/herbal\\_remedies](http://www.msk.org/pe/herbal_remedies))
- ***How to Be a Health Care Agent*** ([www.msk.org/pe/health\\_care\\_agent](http://www.msk.org/pe/health_care_agent))
- ***How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil*** ([www.msk.org/pe/check-med-supplement](http://www.msk.org/pe/check-med-supplement))
- ***Understanding Lymphedema*** ([www.health.ny.gov/publications/0399](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/0399))
- ***What You Can Do to Avoid Falling*** ([www.msk.org/pe/avoid\\_falling](http://www.msk.org/pe/avoid_falling))

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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment

This information explains herbal remedies and how they can affect your treatment.

## About Herbal Remedies

Herbal remedies are any herbs, botanical (plant-based) supplements, or dietary supplements you take for their health benefits. These may come as tablets, capsules, powders, teas, liquid extracts, and fresh or dried plants.

Some herbal remedies can help prevent or manage side effects of cancer or your treatment. The herbal remedies that can help you depend on what symptoms you have and what treatment you're getting.

Even though herbal remedies can feel safe, they may not all be safe. Herbal remedies do not go through the same testing as prescription medications to make sure they work and are safe.

Some herbal remedies may be harmful. This is because they can:

- Affect how your other medications work.
- Raise or lower your blood pressure.
- Thin your blood and increase your risk of bleeding.
- Keep radiation therapy from working as well as it should.
- Change how your body reacts to sedation (medication to make you calmer) or general anesthesia (medication to make you sleepy).

Talk with your healthcare provider about any herbal remedies or other

supplements you are taking. They can provide an open and safe space to talk about these products.

For more information about herbs and supplements, visit [www.aboutherbbs.com](http://www.aboutherbbs.com) or call MSK's Integrative Medicine Service at 646-608-8550.

## **Stop taking herbal remedies before your treatment**

**Stop taking herbal remedies and other dietary supplements 7 days (1 week) before you:**

- Have surgery.
- Start chemotherapy.
- Start radiation therapy.
- Have certain procedures. Your healthcare provider will let you know if you need to stop taking herbal remedies before your procedure.

Herbal remedies and other dietary supplements can cause bleeding and affect your treatment. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for when to restart taking herbal remedies.

You can still use some herbs in your food and drinks, such as using spices in cooking and drinking tea. Herbal remedies are stronger than the herbs you cook with.

## **Common Herbal Remedies and Their Effects**

These are some commonly used herbs and their side effects on cancer treatments.

### **Echinacea (EH-kih-NAY-shuh)**

- Can cause rare but serious allergic reactions, such as a rash or trouble breathing.
- Can keep medications that weaken your immune system from working as well as they should.

## **Garlic**

- Can lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Can increase your risk of bleeding.

## **Ginkgo (also known as Ginkgo biloba)**

- Can increase your risk of bleeding.

## **Ginseng (JIN-seng)**

- Can keep sedation or general anesthesia from working as well as they should.
- Can increase your blood pressure.
- Can increase your risk of bleeding.
- Can lower your blood glucose (sugar) level.

## **Turmeric (TER-mayr-ik)**

- Can keep chemotherapy from working as well as it should.

## **St. John's Wort**

- Can keep some medications from working as well as they should.
- Can make your skin more sensitive to radiation or laser treatment.

## **Valerian (vuh-LEER-ee-un)**

- Can make sedation or general anesthesia affect you more than they should.

## **Herbal formulas**

- Herbal formulas contain many different herbs and dosages.
- Stop taking these products 7 days (1 week) before treatment. Do not start taking herbal formulas again until your healthcare provider tells you it is safe.

This information does not cover all herbal remedies or possible side effects. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.

## Contact Information

- To schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in Integrative Medicine, call 646-608-8550.
- To make an appointment for Integrative Medicine Service's therapies, classes, and workshops, call 646-449-1010.

For more information, visit [www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine](http://www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine) or read *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative\\_therapies](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative_therapies)).

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

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Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment - Last updated on May 5, 2022

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## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil

This information will help you check if your medicines or dietary supplements have aspirin, other NSAIDs, vitamin E, or fish oil as an active ingredient. NSAID stands for nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug.

It's important to stop taking these medicines and supplements before many cancer treatments. They affect your platelets (blood cells that clot to prevent bleeding) and can raise your risk of bleeding.

Other dietary supplements, such as vitamins and herbal remedies, can also affect your cancer treatment. Read *Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/herbal\\_remedies](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/herbal_remedies)) to learn more.

**Make sure your healthcare provider always knows all the prescription and over-the-counter medicines and supplements you're taking.** This includes patches and creams.

A prescription medicine is one you can only get with a prescription from your healthcare provider. An over-the-counter medicine is one you can buy without a prescription.

# What is an active ingredient?

An active ingredient is the part of a medicine or supplement that makes it work. Some medicines and supplements have just one active ingredient. Others have more. For example:

- Ibuprofen is the active ingredient in Advil® and Motrin®. Ibuprofen is an NSAID.
- Naproxen is the active ingredient in Aleve®. Naproxen is an NSAID.
- Acetaminophen is the active ingredient in Tylenol®.
- Aspirin, acetaminophen, and caffeine are the active ingredients in Excedrin®.

Generic medicines sometimes use their active ingredient as their name. But people often call medicines and supplements by a brand name, even if they're generic. This can make it hard to know their active ingredients.

## How to find a medicine or supplement's active ingredients

You can always find the active ingredients by reading the label.

### Over-the-counter medicines

Over-the-counter medicines list their active ingredients in the “Drug Facts” label (see Figure 1). Active ingredients are always the first thing on the Drug Facts label.

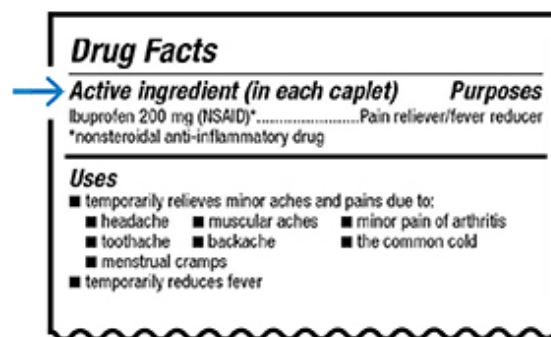


Figure 1. Active ingredients on an over-the-counter medicine label



## Prescription medicines

Prescription medicines list their active ingredients on the label. Their active ingredients and their generic name are the same thing.

Labels often look different depending on which pharmacy you use. Here's an example of where to find a medicine's active ingredients (generic name) on a label from MSK's pharmacy (see Figure 2).

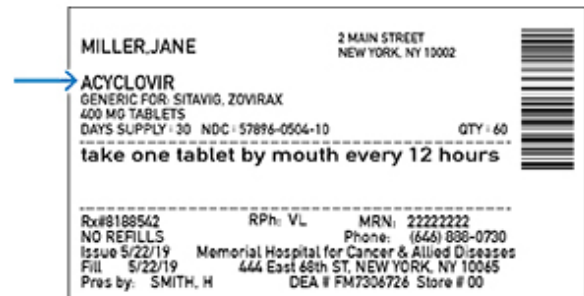


Figure 2. Active ingredients on a prescription medicine label

## Dietary supplements

Dietary supplements list their active ingredients in the "Supplement Facts" label (see Figure 3). The active ingredients always have an amount per serving and % daily value included.

Supplement Facts		
Serving Size 1 Tablet		
	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Vitamin A (as retinyl acetate and 50% as beta-carotene)	5000 IU	100%
Vitamin C (as ascorbic acid)	60 mg	100%
Vitamin D (as cholecalciferol)	400 IU	100%
Vitamin E (as di-alpha tocopheryl acetate)	30 IU	100%
Thiamin (as thiamin mononitrate)	1.5 mg	100%
Riboflavin	1.7 mg	100%
Niacin (as niacinamide)	20 mg	100%
Vitamin B <sub>6</sub> (as pyridoxine hydrochloride)	2.0 mg	100%
Folate (as folic acid)	400 mcg	100%
Vitamin B <sub>12</sub> (as cyanocobalamin)	6 mcg	100%
Biotin	30 mcg	10%
Pantothenic Acid (as calcium pantothenate)	10 mg	100%
Other ingredients: Gelatin, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, FD&C Yellow No. 6, propylene glycol, propylparaben, and sodium benzoate.		

Figure 3. Active ingredients on a supplement label

## Active ingredients to look for

If your medicine or supplement has any of these active ingredients, you may need to stop taking it before, during, or after your cancer treatment or surgery. Follow your care team's instructions.

Active ingredients to look for		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acetylsalicylic acid</li><li>• Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)</li><li>• Aspirin</li><li>• Acetaminophen*</li><li>• Celecoxib</li><li>• Diclofenac</li><li>• Diflunisal</li><li>• Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)</li><li>• Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Etodolac</li><li>• Fish oil</li><li>• Fenoprofen Flurbiprofen</li><li>• Ibuprofen</li><li>• Indomethacin</li><li>• Ketoprofen</li><li>• Ketorolac</li><li>• Meclofenamate</li><li>• Mefenamic acid</li><li>• Meloxicam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nabumetone</li><li>• Naproxen</li><li>• Omega-3 fatty acids</li><li>• Omega-6 fatty acids</li><li>• Oxaprozin</li><li>• Piroxicam</li><li>• Sulindac</li><li>• Tolmetin</li><li>• Vitamin E</li></ul>

\* The full name acetaminophen isn't always written out. Look for the common abbreviations listed below, especially on prescription pain relievers.

Common abbreviations for acetaminophen		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• APAP</li><li>• Acetamin</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AC</li><li>• Acetam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acetaminop</li><li>• Acetaminoph</li></ul>

## About acetaminophen (Tylenol)

In general, acetaminophen is safe to take during cancer treatment. It doesn't affect platelets. That means it will not raise your chance of bleeding. If you're getting chemotherapy, talk with your healthcare provider before taking acetaminophen.

There is a limit to how much acetaminophen you can take in a day. Always follow the instructions from your care team or on the medicine's label.

Acetaminophen is in many different prescription and over-the-counter medicines. It's possible to take too much without knowing. **Always read the label on the medicines you take.** Do not take more than 1 medicine that has acetaminophen at a time without talking with a member of your care team.

## Instructions before your cancer treatment

Tell your healthcare provider if you take aspirin, other NSAIDs, vitamin E, or fish oil. They'll tell you if you need to stop taking it. You'll also find instructions in the information about your treatment.

### Before your surgery

Follow these instructions if you're having surgery or a surgical procedure. **If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.**

- If you take aspirin or a medicine that has aspirin, you may need to change your dose or stop taking it 7 days before your surgery. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. **Do not stop taking aspirin unless your healthcare provider tells you to.**
- If you take vitamin E, fish oil, or a supplement that has vitamin E or fish oil, stop taking it 7 days before your surgery or as directed by your healthcare provider.
- If you take an NSAID or a medicine that has an NSAID, stop taking it 48 hours (2 days) before your surgery or as directed by your healthcare provider.

## Before your radiology procedure

Follow these instructions if you're having a radiology procedure (including Interventional Radiology, Interventional Mammography, Breast Imaging, and General Radiology). **If your healthcare provider gives you other instructions, follow those instead.**

- If you take aspirin or a medicine that has aspirin, you may need to stop taking it 5 days before your procedure. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. **Do not stop taking aspirin unless your healthcare provider tells you to.**
- If you take an NSAID or a medicine that has an NSAID, you may need to stop taking it 24 hours (1 day) before your procedure. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions.

## Before and during your chemotherapy

Chemotherapy can lower your platelet count, which can increase your risk of bleeding. No matter if you're just starting chemotherapy or have been getting it, talk with your healthcare provider before taking aspirin, other NSAIDs, vitamin E, or fish oil.

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.

How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil - Last updated on November 29, 2023

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