



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Ashwagandha

This information describes the common uses of Ashwagandha, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

## What is it?

Ashwagandha is a popular herb used in traditional Indian medicine (Ayurveda) for stress relief and to improve general health. It can help you relax and reduce swelling.

Some lab studies show that it can slow the growth of cancer cells, but this effect has not been observed in humans.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

Ashwagandha is used:

- To reduce anxiety (strong feelings of worry)
- To reduce stress
- To reduce fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual)
- To reduce joint pain
- To treat diabetes

It's generally safe to use ashwagandha in food and tea. However, talk with your

healthcare providers before taking supplements or higher amounts of ashwagandha. Supplements are stronger than the herbs you would use in cooking.

Ashwagandha 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 ashwagandha may include:

- Nausea (feeling like you’re going to throw up)
- Headache
- Drowsiness
- Stomach irritation
- Diarrhea (loose or watery stool)

## What else do I need to know?

- Don’t use ashwagandha if you’re pregnant because it may cause abortion (end your pregnancy).
- Talk with your doctor if you have hormone-sensitive prostate cancer because ashwagandha may increase testosterone levels. This can interfere with your treatments.
- Ashwagandha may increase the drowsiness effects of some prescription medications so talk with your healthcare provider before taking it.

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.

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