



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# PC-SPES

This information describes the common uses of PC-SPES, 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?

**Although PC-SPES has been studied in prostate cancer patients, the product was recalled due to product contamination.**

PC-SPES is an herbal formula containing 8 herbs: [reishi mushroom](#), [baikal skullcap](#), [rabdosia](#), [dyer's woad](#), [chrysanthemum](#), [saw palmetto](#), *Panax ginseng*, and [licorice](#). Scientists do not know which substances in PC-SPES account for its activity. No single botanical or chemical extract appears responsible for the overall effects of this product. Laboratory tests have analyzed

the makeup of PC-SPES and have identified estrogen-like compounds that suppress growth and proliferation of human tumor cell lines on contact, including breast, colon, and hormone-dependent and -independent prostate cancers. PC-SPES appears to interfere with the process of tumor cell division and also causes tumor cell death when cells are exposed to it long enough. The ability of PC-SPES to kill cancer cells may be due to alteration of specific genes involved in regulating cell cycle, structure, and response to androgens, such as testosterone. However, this effect has not been confirmed in humans.

PC-SPES used in clinical trials has been found to contain small amounts of prescription drugs including diethylstilbestrol and ethinyl estradiol. It is unclear whether these agents account for its anticancer effects.

## **What are the potential uses and benefits?**

- **To treat prostate cancer**

Several preliminary studies showed that PC-SPES can lower PSA levels, but none found evidence of anticancer effects in men with prostate cancer.

# What are the side effects?

- Breast pain
- Breast enlargement
- Sexual dysfunction and/or decreased libido
- GI symptoms, diarrhea, and dyspepsia
- **Rare:** Blood clots, including lung blood clots; vein inflammation, swelling, and allergic reactions

## Case report

- **Abdominal cavity bleeding:** In a 62-year-old man with hormone-refractory prostate cancer and nodal metastases after one month of unsupervised use of this compound.

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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