



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Vitamin C

This information describes the common uses of Vitamin C, 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?

Vitamin C is a vitamin that keeps you healthy. Your body can't make vitamin C on its own so you need to get it from food. Foods that are rich in vitamin C include citrus fruits like oranges, fresh vegetables, berries, and melons.

If you don't get enough vitamin C from food, your healthcare provider may recommend you take vitamin C supplements or take a multivitamin that has vitamin C.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Vitamin C is used to:

- Prevent and treat the common cold
- Treat upper respiratory infections (infections that affect your breathing)
- Improve heart health
- Heal wounds

Vitamin C also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to eat foods that are rich in vitamin C. However, talk with your healthcare provider before taking supplements or higher amounts of vitamin C.

Herbal supplements can 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?

Vitamin C is generally safe. But supplements can sometimes cause side effects such as:

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements)

- Stomach cramps
- Low blood sugar
- Low blood pressure

What else do I need to know?

Foods that are rich in vitamin C are safe. The statements below refer to vitamin C supplements.

- Talk to your healthcare provider if you have kidney stones or kidney disease. Vitamin C can make these conditions worse.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you're on dialysis for kidney disease. Vitamin C can worsen your condition.
- Avoid vitamin C if you're on bortezomib (Velcade®) as part of your cancer treatment. Vitamin C can affect the way this medication acts in your body.
- Avoid vitamin C if you're on radiation therapy or chemotherapy. Vitamin C can interfere with these treatments and decrease their effects.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you're taking acetaminophen (paracetamol®). Vitamin C can increase the side effects of this medication.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you have hemochromatosis (a condition where too much iron

builds up in your body). Vitamin C can increase how much iron your body absorbs.

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.

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