Ready to start planning your care? Call us at 800-525-2225 to make an appointment.
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Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

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Give to MSK

What is it?

The Gerson regimen does not treat or prevent cancer.

The Gerson regimen was developed by Max Gerson in the 1940s. It involves a strict metabolic diet that emphasizes fresh fruit and vegetable juice, high carbohydrate and potassium, no sodium or fat, and low animal protein. The diet is often supplemented with digestive enzymes, coffee enemas, and various supplements, including laetrile. This diet is based on the theory that it addresses the cause of cancer by detoxifying the body and stimulating metabolism so that the body can heal itself. These toxins, Gerson claimed, build up from environmental pollution and processed foods, and eventually alter cell metabolism. However, this proposed toxin build-up has never been proven, nor has the diet's ability to remove such toxins from the body.

Coffee enemas are used in several metabolic therapies. Theoretically, they may help excretion from the liver and colon, but it has not been proven. Coffee enemas can actually be dangerous when used repeatedly, causing electrolyte imbalances in the blood and impaired nutrient absorption. Because the high

levels of fruits and vegetables are eaten raw, they may not be absorbed as easily, especially in patients with gastrointestinal cancers or chemotherapy-induced gastrointestinal disorders.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

There is no scientific evidence to support use of Gerson regimen for the following claims:

- To manage allergies and asthma
- To treat arthritis
- To treat atherosclerosis
- To treat cancer
- To treat heart disease
- To treat chronic fatigue syndrome
- To detoxify the body
- To treat diabetes
- To lower high blood pressure
- To treat infertility
- To treat Lou Gehrig’s Disease
- To treat migraine headaches
- To treat multiple sclerosis
- To treat peptic ulcers
- To treat psoriasis
- To treat tuberculosis

What are the side effects?

- Flu-like symptoms
- Loss of appetite
- Perspiration with foul odor
- Weakness, dizziness
- Cold sores, fever blisters
- High fever
- Tumor pain
- Intestinal cramping, diarrhea, and vomiting

- Coffee enemas can cause electrolyte imbalance, which has resulted in serious infections, dehydration, colitis, constipation, seizures, pleural and pericardial effusions (fluid collecting in the lining around the lungs and heart), and death.
- Coma from low sodium levels in the blood has occurred in a few cases.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- The American Cancer Society warns that Gerson therapy can be very harmful to the body.
- Metabolic diets such as Gerson Regimen can result in nutrient deficiencies (calcium, vitamins D and B12, protein), anemia, and malabsorption in the intestine.

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 to search our virtual library.
Gerson Regimen - Last updated on February 10, 2023

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