

## Probiotics during cancer therapy

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### Should probiotics be recommended for patients undergoing chemotherapy?

Probiotic supplements are generally not recommended for patients who are undergoing chemotherapy. Supplements refer to non-dietary sources such as tablets and capsules. It is generally considered safe to consume yogurt. However, it may be prudent to avoid yogurts with “Probiotic” claims as they may contain higher amounts of live bacterial culture than regular yogurt. The following is an excerpt from the [November 2011 issue](#) of the Systemic Therapy Update (1):

*Although probiotics are safe to use in healthy individuals, they can potentially become pathogenic and cause infections in immunocompromised patients. Many patients receiving chemotherapy drugs have weakened immune systems because of chemotherapy-induced leukopenias. A 2006 review conducted by Boyle et al. cited 12 cases of bacterial sepsis and 24 cases of fungal sepsis that were likely related to probiotics. All of the cases occurred in patients with pre-existing morbidities. Patients receiving chemotherapy should NOT take probiotic supplements unless they have consulted their oncologist to discuss the risks and benefits.*

#### Reference:

Kalyn R. FAQ: Use of Probiotics During Chemotherapy Treatment. Systemic Therapy Update Newsletter. 2011;14(11):3-4.

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