



Is It Safe to Use Supplements During CLL Treatment?

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Jeff Folloder:

Dr. Burke, we just heard one word that made my eyebrows perk up—probiotics. I start thinking probiotics, and next I'm thinking supplements, and I'm thinking herbal green tea. All the things that you read about and hear about on the Internet that can be beneficial to someone on a cancer journey. We're talking about coping with our physical and mental well-being, a distributor we hear something that sounds like it's gonna be beneficial. Is it a good idea for us to mess around with something like that?

Dr. Burke:

I think it's common. I think many people do exactly what you're saying and mess around with that stuff and I confess, to be honest, some degree of ignorance to the effects of every single one of those that's out there on a person's CLL. I think most of them really have not been vigorously studied in a scientific fashion in the way that we're talking about some of these other drugs that we use and recommend routinely. So I often confess sort of agnosticism about what sort of impact those will have, and some degree of skepticism about how much impact it will have. I think perhaps the one exception that I'm aware of is green tea extract, which has been studied in sort of a formal fashion.

And it has been shown to have a modest degree of activity, but also some significant side effects with rising liver enzymes in a significant number of patients. So I get that question a lot, and I tell people what I know. It's not something I routinely recommend, but I think I have a lot of patients who do try that type of thing.

Jeff Folloder:

So, Dr. Wierda, I'm going to assume that you want to know everything that your patients are putting in their body.

Dr. Wierda:

Yes.

Jeff Folloder:

And along the line of supplements and probiotics and things like that, have you seen with your patients that they enjoy some relief from side effects from treatment or improved quality of life by consuming these things?

Dr. Wierda:

I have had patients—I will start out by saying if a patient goes on treatment, whether it's standard of care or if it's on a clinical trial, I will discourage them from taking supplements.

I don't like patients taking any supplements if they're on a clinical trial, or they're on standard of care, because the compounds in those supplements are not controlled like we have control of the drugs that we use. And we have—I can cite numerous examples of patients who have liver enzyme abnormalities or something's happening because they were taking something that was a supplement that again, those things are not controlled, and they're not as closely regulated as medications are.

So I discourage patients from taking them while they're getting active treatment. If they're not getting active treatment, I don't discourage them. I'm not opposed to supplements. I have a patient, for example, who I was very intrigued by who had multiple treatments. She was on idelalisib (Zydelig). She was progressing. She came off idelalisib.

At that time, she changed her diet. She went on one of those fanatical diets that you were mentioning—no sugar and no wheat, etc. And her disease went into remission. So she's in remission now. I do think there's something to diet. Unfortunately, it hasn't been as scientifically studied as the Western medications that we use, the chemotherapies that we use. I am a firm believer in the impact of diet on your overall health. I think it's important.

Supplements, I have a personal experience recently where I went on a multivitamin. I wasn't on any medications, went on a multivitamin, and all of a sudden my blood pressure was like 170. Finally, I figured it out that it was this multivitamin that I had taken. So I think there are side effects that we get from those that you sometimes realize and you sometimes don't. I went off the multivitamin, and my blood pressure went back to normal.

So I'm a little bit skeptical about the supplements, but diet I think is very important.

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