FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
CONSUMER INFORMATION

Cancer Treatment Scams

If you or someone you love has cancer, chances are you're sorting through mountains of information and facing many decisions about various treatment options. And you may be curious about supposed miraculous cancer-fighting products — pills, powders, herbs, and more — that you've either seen advertised or heard about from family and friends. Be skeptical: Lots of these are scams, and when you're battling cancer, the last thing you need is a scam.

The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, says it's a good idea to talk to the doctor treating your cancer about any products you'd like to try. In many cases, the product can have serious repercussions: it won't treat the cancer; and it could even harm you. Asking questions is the best way to satisfy your curiosity, and manage your treatment wisely.

Curious About a Product?

Ask your doctor before you try it — or buy it. The doctor treating you can tell you about the risks of a product, as well as how it might affect your current treatment or any medications you might be taking.

In your research, you may come across references to complementary and alternative medicine. Complementary therapies are meant to enhance standard medical treatment like surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy. Your treatment team can tell you whether there's any proof that a complementary therapy may help reduce your discomfort or other symptoms.

On the other hand, alternative therapies are meant to replace conventional cancer treatment. Reputable medical and cancer experts generally do not recommend alternative products and practices because there's no proof that they are effective treatments for cancer. Many can even be harmful. Remember that stopping or delaying conventional treatment may have serious consequences.

Are products claiming to treat or cure cancer the hot new thing, old-fashioned snake oil, or something in between?

All cancers are different, and no one treatment works for every cancer or every body. Even two people with the same diagnosis may need different treatments. That's one reason it's best to be skeptical of websites with ads for products that claim to treat cancer.

Scammers take advantage of the feelings that can accompany a diagnosis of cancer. They promote unproven – and potentially dangerous – remedies like black salve, essiac tea, or laetrile with claims that the products are both "natural" and effective. But "natural" doesn't mean either safe or effective when it comes to using these treatments for cancer. In fact, a product that is

labeled “natural,” can be more than ineffective: it can be downright harmful.

Are the ads and websites that promote alternative or “natural” treatments and cures for cancer on the up-and-up?

Bogus marketers often use trickery and vague language to take advantage of people. For example, testimonials in ads can seem honest and heart-felt, but they can be completely fake: in fact, they may not disclose that actors or models have been paid to endorse the product. Even when testimonials come from people who have taken the product, personal stories aren’t reliable evidence of effectiveness. And lots of technical jargon may sound impressive, but by itself, doesn’t prove effectiveness. Big words from a medical dictionary are no substitute for the plain facts from your doctor.

A money-back guarantee doesn’t prove that a product works, either. Even if the guarantee that you’re promised is legitimate, a money-back guarantee definitely is not a reliable substitute for scientific evidence that a treatment is safe or effective. For more information from the federal government about cancer treatments in general, visit cancer.gov and nih.gov.

This article was previously available as *Curious About Cancer Treatments? Talk to Your Doctor First.*

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