

Supplement Intake Among Older Cancer Survivors: Socio-Demographic Associations, Supplement Types, Reasons for Use, and Cost

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Objectives: To evaluate associations between supplement intake and socio-demographic factors among older cancer survivors and to identify type of supplements, reasons for use, and cost.

Methods: This secondary analysis was performed on baseline data from 368 older cancer survivors enrolled in the Harvest for Health vegetable gardening intervention trial. Survivors self-identifying as supplement users reported data on prescribed, over-the counter, and dietary supplements. Chi-square tests were performed to identify associations among supplement use, cancer type, and socio-demographic variables. Descriptive analyses were used to identify common types, reasons of supplement intake, and total daily cost of supplements.

Results: More than half (59%) of the sample reported taking supplements. Female (OR 2.12, 95% CI 1.35–3.32), Non-Hispanic White (OR 1.78, 95% CI 1.06–3.01), and breast and gynecological

cancer survivors (OR 1.58, 1.04–2.40) were significantly more likely to take a supplement compared to males, minorities, and other cancer-types (p -value < 0.05). Survivors reported a mean intake of three supplements, with vitamins (38%), multivitamins (22%), and minerals (12%) as the most prevalent. Commonly-reported reasons for supplement intake were to improve general health (47%), medical conditions (39%), and cancer-related symptoms (12%). Bone health was the most prevalent reason cited under medical conditions, and hair loss, fatigue, and sleep were most commonly reported under cancer-related symptoms. The daily cost of supplements ranged from \$0.02–\$19.81, with the mean, median and mode being \$1.29/day, \$0.78/day, and \$0.34/day, respectively.

Conclusions: Nutritional supplement use is prevalent among older cancer survivors with overall health identified as the most common reason for supplement intake. Moreover, out-of-pocket recurrent costs can be substantial. These data emphasize the need to encourage a diet rich in nutrients to minimize daily cost of supplements among older survivors who may live on fixed incomes. Survivors should discuss proper use of supplements with their healthcare providers.

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