Mushrooms Against Cancer
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I have long been an advocate of the healing power of mushrooms, and was recently asked about the advisability of using a product from Japan called active hexose correlated compound (AHCC). AHCC is a Japanese medicinal mushroom extract formulated to help strengthen the immune system. It is being marketed in Japan as a supplement for cancer patients, particularly those undergoing chemotherapy. The manufacturer also suggests it has a use for prevention of recurrences among patients who have been treated for cancer, and for the promotion and maintenance of good health.

Reportedly, AHCC is a hot item in Japan and has been the subject of many clinical studies there. According to its marketing claims, it is now being researched in the United States and elsewhere as well: a study in mice at Drexel University found that it may improve the immune response to the flu. And a study in Thailand suggested that it prolonged the survival of patients with advanced liver cancer.

Until trials are completed to demonstrate its efficacy, I would advocate that cancer patients considering its use exercise caution. Traditional medicinal mushrooms are generally non-toxic, and it probably won’t cause any harm, but may not be doing any good.

Such patients might consider the mushrooms I recommend to cancer patients for their proven immune-enhancing and anti-cancer effects:
* Maitake (Grifola frondosa) is an edible mushroom known in the U.S. as “hen of the woods” because in appearance it resembles the fluffed tail feathers of a nesting hen. In addition to its anti-cancer, anti-viral and immune-enhancing properties, maitake may also reduce blood pressure and blood sugar.
* Reishi (Ganoderma lucidum) is too bitter to eat but is widely available in tea bags, capsules and liquid extracts. Animal studies have shown that reishi improves immune function and inhibits the growth of some malignant tumors; it is also a natural anti-inflammatory agent.
* Agaricus blazei, now known as Agaricus brasiliensis, contains beta glucans, a group of polysaccharides (complex sugars) believed responsible for this mushroom’s immune-boosting effects. Research has shown that Agaricus blazei has anti-tumor and anti-viral activity, as well as moderating effects on blood sugar and cholesterol. Oncologists in both Japan and Brazil use this mushroom in treatment protocols. It is sold in the U.S. in dried form as well as in extracts. One very good source for these is Fungi Perfecti in Olympia, Wash. (www.fungi.com).

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