



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer



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We are grateful to the complementary therapy practitioners who shared their experiences of using complementary therapies with their patients:

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Introduction

If you have cancer, your healthcare team has probably created a plan with treatments such as surgery, radiation therapy or chemotherapy. These are all conventional ways to treat cancer.

Many other kinds of therapies, called complementary therapies, can support conventional cancer treatment. Massage, acupuncture, meditation, yoga and hypnosis are all examples of complementary therapies for cancer. Some evidence shows that these types of therapies have helped people with cancer feel better physically and emotionally.

It's up to you to decide if you'd like to use complementary therapies during your cancer journey. But be sure that your choice is both safe and informed. This means:

- understanding the differences between conventional, complementary and alternative therapies
- finding out as much as you can about the therapy you're thinking about, including the possible benefits and risks
- talking to your healthcare team about how the therapy may act together with your conventional treatment
- understanding your goals for the complementary therapy and being confident it can help you meet your overall goals for treatment



I always tell patients, 'Balance your choices around complementary therapies with your quality of life.' Quality of life isn't just how you feel physically: it's also about your emotional health, financial health and your relationships. ~ Lynda Balneaves (complementary therapy expert and researcher)

In this booklet you'll hear both from people who have used complementary therapies and from practitioners who offer them. The first part of the booklet focuses on understanding what complementary therapy is, finding reliable information and making decisions. The second part describes some of the more common complementary therapies used by people living with cancer. The information in this booklet, and the quotes from people sharing their experiences, will help you talk about the subject with your healthcare team and your family.



What are complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies are used for many health problems and diseases and to help people stay healthy and feel better. In this booklet, we focus on complementary therapies and how they relate to cancer.



To understand complementary therapies, you need to understand the wide range of cancer care available both in the hospital and in the community.

Conventional cancer treatments

Conventional cancer treatments – such as surgery, chemotherapy and radiation – focus on interfering with cancer’s ability to grow and spread. They are provided by healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, radiation therapists and pharmacists.

Research tells us that these are our best ways to stop cancer from spreading. Health Canada approves the treatments you’re offered only after they’ve been shown to be safe and effective in scientific studies of large numbers of people.

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies do not treat the cancer itself. Complementary therapies can be used to help people cope physically and emotionally with cancer and with side effects from cancer treatment. They can also be used to improve your overall health and feeling of well-being. For example, acupuncture to help with nausea caused by chemotherapy is a complementary therapy. Another example is yoga to help you feel more relaxed and sleep better while you are having treatment.



It's just another tool in your arsenal of things to fight cancer. But complementary therapies, naturopathic stuff, they have to go alongside conventional cancer treatment.

~ Danielle (caregiver)

A complementary therapy is used together with conventional cancer treatments. “I do have patients who hope that I can cure their cancer,” says Bruce Cawdron, an acupuncturist who works with cancer patients. “And I say, ‘You know, you’re taking chemo and radiation to help cure cancer. I’m here to help you get some relief from the side effects of those treatments.’”

What about integrative cancer care?

You may have read or heard about integrative cancer care. It’s an approach that combines conventional and complementary therapies throughout the cancer experience. At integrative cancer centres, complementary therapies are offered along with conventional cancer treatments by a team of people from both fields. It’s based on the idea that as long as you’re watched closely for what happens when the treatments are given at the same time, the therapies can work well together and benefit people with cancer.

Most cancer centres in Canada do not offer what is known as integrative cancer care, but access to some complementary therapies within cancer centres is becoming more common. For example, the centre that Karen went to for breast cancer treatment offered therapeutic touch sessions to chemotherapy patients. She had a session before each round of chemo.

If your cancer centre doesn’t offer complementary therapies, you can still create your own integrative approach by finding and working with complementary therapy practitioners while you go through treatment and beyond.

Alternative therapies

People often use the words complementary and alternative as if they mean the same thing. In fact, they mean something very different. While complementary therapies are used *together with* conventional treatment, alternative therapies are used *instead of* conventional treatment.

For example, if you're anxious before every chemotherapy session and you find that therapeutic touch helps with these feelings, you're using therapeutic touch as a complementary therapy. If you decide to try to treat the cancer itself with therapeutic touch instead of chemotherapy because you think therapeutic touch can cure cancer, this is an alternative therapy.

Alternative therapies have not been shown to be safe or effective in treating cancer. Relying only on alternative treatments for cancer may have serious health effects, such as the cancer spreading or getting worse.

Refusing to have conventional treatment is a personal decision. If you postpone or refuse conventional treatment and try an alternative treatment, keep in contact with your oncologist (cancer doctor). Your oncologist may not agree with your decision, but it's important for someone to keep track of how you're doing. You may decide to use conventional treatment later.

You have the right to choose

As a patient, you have the right to choose whether or not to take the treatment your doctor recommends. You can accept or refuse some or all of the conventional, complementary and alternative therapies offered to you.

The Canadian Cancer Society believes that people with cancer must make treatment decisions with the best available information, including knowledge of what the treatment can do and what the side effects may be. Treatments that offer the best hope of success are backed up by good scientific evidence.

Why people use complementary therapies

“ When I learned that my cancer was really aggressive, that the treatment was going to be unusually long and brutal, I worried about how I would manage it all. I was interested in looking at what could possibly help me through this time in addition to conventional treatments. So I made an appointment with a naturopathic doctor who'd been recommended to me who had extensive training and experience working with cancer patients. After we talked and she suggested a treatment plan, it made sense to me to embark on this dual track of complementary and conventional cancer care. ~ Tamara

People choose complementary therapies for different reasons. Many people find that complementary therapies are a good balance to their conventional cancer treatments. Complementary therapies tend to focus on your health and healing rather than your disease. They aim to improve overall well-being and support the link between the mind, body and spirit in the healing process.

You may think about using complementary therapies if you want to:

- ease the symptoms of cancer and the side effects of treatment, such as fatigue, loss of appetite and weight loss, trouble sleeping, nausea and pain
- help cope with stress
- gain a sense of balance in your life
- explore all your options
- strengthen your body's immune system and ability to heal
- feel more in control over your health
- be more involved in your own care
- restore a sense of hope

The power of a healthy lifestyle

As you think about complementary therapies, remember that you can do lots of things on your own to feel better and improve your health. There is growing proof that healthy lifestyle choices can support your own healing and quality of life – and can help prevent some types of cancer from coming back. These lifestyle choices include being active, eating well, quitting smoking, having a healthy body weight, protecting yourself from the sun and UV rays, and limiting how much alcohol you drink.



Before using complementary therapies

“ You’ve got to balance your hopes and your beliefs with your resources. ~ Lynda Balneaves (complementary therapy expert and researcher)

There are many things to think about as you decide whether to use complementary therapies and which ones to use. To make sure your choice is safe and informed, you will need to:

- Look for information about the therapy.
- Ask about possible side effects with your conventional treatment.
- Figure out your goals for the therapy. What do you hope it will do for you? Are you being realistic?
- Evaluate the therapy you’re thinking about using. Can it help you achieve your goals? Are you comfortable with how the therapy is given? What are the financial costs to you and your family? How much of your time will the therapy take?
- Talk to your doctor, qualified complementary therapy practitioner or someone else on your healthcare team.
- Talk to your family. Do they support your choices?

Where to find information

Do some research before you begin any complementary therapy. Evidence-based websites, your hospital or cancer centre, and integrative cancer centres are good sources of information. As well, you should be able to get information about the complementary therapy from a practitioner who offers it – for example, a registered massage therapist, acupuncturist or naturopathic doctor should be able to give you information about the therapy and explain how it can be part of your overall cancer treatment.

Once you’ve done your research, then you can talk to your doctor and other members of your healthcare team about your next steps.

Online

The Internet offers lots of information about therapies for cancer, but it isn't perfect. There are no rules on what can be posted on a site, and many sites just want to sell you something. It can be hard to know if what you find is accurate, complete or relevant to you.

To get the most from searching online:

- Look for websites run by the government, hospitals and healthcare centres, academic and research facilities, or other credible not-for-profit groups. Look for the HONcode logo, which shows that the site has been approved by the Health On the Net Foundation.
- Make sure the information is up to date. Check the date when the information was posted or updated and the dates of any scientific studies or reports.
- Look for information that is easy to read and explained clearly. You should be able to send in questions and find links to other sites that may be helpful.
- Search websites that are meant to provide information, rather than sites that are mostly about selling products. Look for references from scientific journals if the website claims to have done studies on a therapy.

Claims to cure cancer

Beware of sites that have many patient stories or testimonials about cures or that claim to have the cure for cancer – especially if the cure is for sale. A credible site will not make this claim.

Resource centres and libraries

“ We do our best to make sure clients have the information they need to make decisions. They meet with a care coordinator to make sure they know how the clinic works and how we can integrate with their medical support team. At any time, we can provide in-depth research summaries, which are called monographs, for the therapies we offer.

~ Anne Pitman (integrative care coordinator and yoga therapist)

Many treatment centres and hospitals have resource centres where you can look for information. If there isn't a resource centre where you're being treated, try your local public library. Libraries have more than just books, magazines and journals - many also have audio books, videos and DVDs on conventional treatments and complementary therapies that you can borrow. If you need help, ask the librarian.

Public libraries usually have computers you can use for online searches.

If you need help searching

Information specialists at the Canadian Cancer Society can help you find the information you need. Our services are free and confidential. To contact us:

- Call us toll-free Monday to Friday at 1-888-939-3333 (TTY 1-866-786-3934).
- Email info@cis.cancer.ca.
- Visit cancer.ca.



How to evaluate the information

Evaluating information about therapies and scientific studies may be new to you. We are learning more about complementary therapies, but we still need more evidence from well-designed research studies to understand how well they work. Think about the nature and the source of the information you have found.

Make sure that:

- It comes from a reliable and trustworthy source. If the maker or provider of the therapy has written the information, it may be biased.
- It references scientific studies published in credible scientific journals (for example, those listed on the public online database PubMed). The scientific references should be listed and easy to find. Avoid claims that seem doubtful but are made to look like scientific research by quoting “experts,” citing statistics and using scientific language without listing the references to published scientific articles.
- The information doesn’t rely only on people’s stories or testimonials.
- It includes information about any potential risks or side effects of the therapy.
- The study relates to the type of cancer you have.
- The study is done in humans and not only in animals. Studies that test treatments in people in large groups and over a long period of time are usually better than studies that only test the treatment in a small number of people over a short period.

Look at what the therapy claims to do. A claim to ease side effects or symptoms should be carefully examined. Beware of claims to cure cancer with complementary or alternative therapies.

Keep your healthcare team informed

“ When I told my doctor that I was doing naturopathic stuff, he didn't pooh-pooh it or condone it. He just said okay. I would say he accepts it. He's open enough to realize that nobody wants cancer, that people are going to do what they feel is necessary to fight cancer. ~ Bryan

Be open and honest with everyone on your healthcare team. Your doctor needs to know about any complementary therapies you're using or thinking about using. It's also important that your acupuncturist, registered massage therapist or any other complementary therapy practitioner knows that you're being treated for cancer.

Many people don't talk to their doctors about complementary therapies because they're afraid their doctors won't approve. Others believe they're using something natural and non-toxic and therefore don't need to tell them. But telling your doctor will help make sure that any complementary therapy you're thinking of using is safe and will not get in the way of your conventional treatment.

Your doctor might question the therapy or not really be interested in talking about it. Many doctors trained in conventional medicine have received very little training or information on complementary medicine. They might not be comfortable advising you on these therapies. If your doctor advises you not to use a complementary therapy, it's okay to ask why. You can also ask a complementary therapy practitioner for more information.



I asked my doctor about acupuncture or about working with a naturopathic doctor. He was very dismissive, telling me they were a bunch of quacks eager to make a buck off of desperate people. I found his attitude very worrisome. In the end, I found another oncologist, someone who was willing to have these conversations with me. ~ Tamara

In the end, it's your choice to use – or not use – a complementary therapy. Talking things over with all members of your healthcare team, as well as your friends and family, should help you make a decision that is safe and informed.

Tips for talking to your doctor



I had a list of the vitamins and supplements prescribed by my naturopathic doctor, as well as some printouts of the research. I took the list to my next appointment with my oncologist. He took a look and said, 'That's fine. I don't have any difficulty with you doing this.' ~ Tamara

Your doctor may be able to suggest complementary therapies that can help with your concerns. But many won't. Try these tips when you want to talk to your doctor about a complementary therapy:

- Tell your doctor that you'd like to talk about a complementary therapy and ask if you could have some time to do so.
- Don't bring piles of paper with you. Focus on the therapies you're most interested in and bring a page or so of information about each to your appointment.
- Explain why you're interested in using a certain therapy – for example, your goals for the therapy or how you think it will help you.
- Bring in a list of questions you have about using the therapy. For example:
 - > When would it be safe for me to use this therapy with my conventional cancer treatment?

- > Can you help make sure I'm taking safe doses of this therapy or tell me who on the team can help?
- > Do you know of any risks or benefits from using this therapy? Could you help me track them?
- > Are you open to having this as part of my plan as long as we continue to monitor my progress?
- > Can you give me a referral to a qualified practitioner for this therapy?
- > Do you have any ideas about other complementary therapies that could be helpful for the type of cancer I have, for the treatment I'm having or to help with my treatment goals?



Making the right decision for you

“ If you believe in a certain complementary therapy, and if you go to a practitioner that you believe has appropriate training and understands your condition, and if you’re able to afford it both financially and in terms of time, then I wouldn’t discourage you from using the therapy. You may actually experience benefits and it may also give you a better sense of control and hope, which I think is incredibly important.
~ Lynda Balneaves (complementary therapy expert and researcher)

Once you’ve gathered all your information, you still have many things to think about in order to make the right decision for you – for example, the safety of the therapy, the cost, the time it takes and how it will work with your conventional cancer care.

Questions to ask yourself

Is it safe?

Ask yourself whether you have enough information on the safety of the therapy. Because there isn’t a lot of evidence on many complementary therapies in cancer care, you may need to think about what level of evidence is good enough for you. If you don’t feel you understand the safety of the therapy well enough, take some time to look for more information or go back to the practitioner with more questions.

Do I have medical reasons to avoid this therapy?

Some complementary therapies can be harmful for people with certain health issues. For example, someone with a bleeding disorder or lymphedema should not have deep-tissue massage. Some supplements can interfere with the body’s ability to process medicine. Be sure to find out whether the complementary therapy you’re thinking about is safe and effective when used with your conventional treatment and any health issues you have.

Will it help me with my goals for treatment?

Think about your goals for both your conventional and complementary treatments. Do you want relief from pain or nausea? Do you want to manage stress or learn how to relax? Knowing your goals should make it easier to decide whether a therapy will help you reach them. Remember also that your goals can change over time.

What will it cost and how much time will it take?

Complementary therapies aren't usually covered by provincial or other health plans. Some are covered by private health insurance plans. "It can get pretty expensive," says Bryan, about the supplements he takes and the cost of his visits to his naturopathic doctor.

Researching which complementary therapy to use – and going to the appointments – can also take a lot of time. Think about how much time and money you can afford to spend.

How involved do I want to be?

Complementary therapies can take a lot of time and energy. You may have to change your lifestyle. Think about whether you're prepared to make such changes and about how involved you'd like to be in managing your complementary therapy.

How do my therapies work together?

Many people use more than one type of complementary therapy. Think about how these therapies work together. Could there be any side effects from these choices? Ask members of your healthcare team or complementary therapy practitioners about possible side effects or reasons to avoid using the therapies together.

How will I know if it's helping me?

To decide whether something is helping you, think about your goals for the therapy and what's important to you. For example, if you've decided to try hypnosis to reduce pain or anxiety, have you found that you have less pain or feel calmer after your sessions?

Your personal feelings about your treatment are very important. Sometimes, how you feel is the only way to measure the success of the treatment. Bryan, for example, was diagnosed with cancer of the appendix. He decided to see a naturopathic doctor in order to boost his immune system, improve or maintain his quality of life, and help deal with any side effects of treatment. So far, he feels that the complementary therapies he uses have helped him meet those goals. The supplements he takes have helped with symptoms like constipation and mouth sores. And even though his cancer is advanced, Bryan says, "I feel really, really good. I have energy. I'm pretty well doing whatever I want to do. I don't feel like I have cancer."

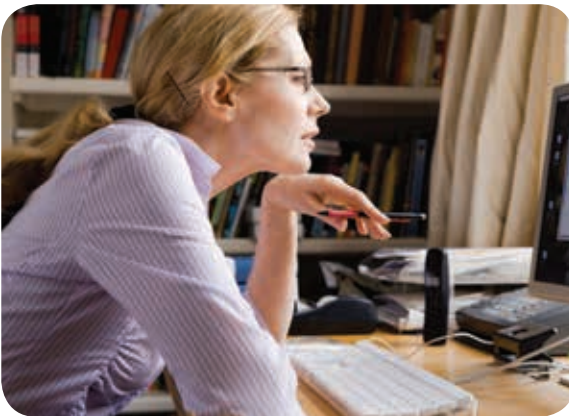
Watch for any physical side effects from your complementary therapies. Remember that benefits and risks can also be financial, social, emotional or spiritual. You may also want to think about how long you're willing to commit to trying a therapy before it begins to help you.



Choosing a complementary therapy practitioner

Most complementary therapies are provided by a practitioner. (You may be able to treat yourself with some complementary therapies, such as meditation.) It's important to find qualified practitioners that you feel comfortable with and can trust. To find someone, you can:

- Ask your doctor or another member of your healthcare team.
- Check the resources at your treatment centre.
- Contact professional associations.
- Ask around. Many people with cancer and cancer survivors have tried complementary therapies, and many will be happy to share their experiences with you. You might talk to people that you meet at treatment or at cancer support groups. Ask who they see, what the practitioner is like, how the practitioner dealt with concerns they had, and so on.



Qualifications and training of complementary therapy practitioners – what’s important?

When choosing a complementary therapy practitioner, there are many things to consider. All therapies have different training and the practitioners have different backgrounds. It’s important to consider the qualifications and training of practitioners and whether they are regulated or licensed in your province or territory. Having experience in caring for people with cancer is also important because some therapies can be unsafe if they’re given at the wrong time or in the wrong way.

Most – but not all – practitioners have formal training or have gone through apprenticeship programs. For example, people can go to public and private colleges and training courses for several years to study acupuncture, naturopathic medicine, massage therapy, hypnotherapy and other complementary therapies. Practitioners often apply the skills they learned in school by working directly with someone more experienced through an internship program. Ask about your practitioner’s education and training.

Some complementary therapies are regulated by provincial or territorial governments through regulatory colleges, which set standards to protect your right to safe, competent and ethical healthcare. Many complementary therapy practitioners, regulated and unregulated, are also members of local, provincial, territorial or national associations, which also establish practice standards for their members. They may have to pass exams or keep up to date with current knowledge or standards of practice to remain members. You can ask about your practitioner’s membership in these associations and check if they are a member in good standing.

In this booklet, when we talk about qualified complementary therapy practitioners, we mean someone who has been trained to offer the therapy. If there is a licensing or professional association that governs that therapy, then the practitioner belongs to that group and follows its rules.

Tips for choosing a practitioner

Make sure that any complementary therapy practitioner you choose knows that you have cancer. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

“ It was very important to me that my therapists were people who had worked with people with cancer. As well as their professional competence, they knew the stages and phases, the treatments and the fears. They had the sensitivity as to where people were at emotionally and physically. ~ Karen

Remember to

- Ask about training and qualifications. How long have they been practising? Are they experienced or trained in treating people with cancer? What types of cancer? How many people have they treated?
- Find out if the clinic, facility or practitioner providing the therapy is linked with a recognized cancer centre, cancer agency, hospital or university.
- Ask if the practitioner is willing to work with your conventional healthcare team by sharing patient files, by providing information about the therapy or in other ways.
- Make sure the practitioner gives you information in a way that is easy for you to understand. They should tell you what is involved and the risks and benefits of each therapy.
- Ask what the practitioner thinks about conventional medicine. This will help you feel comfortable about speaking openly and honestly with everyone involved in your care.
- Take a detailed description of the therapy and talk about it with your doctor.
- Ask for information that you can read at home where there is less pressure to make a decision.

Be cautious

- Practitioners or practices may make claims of being able to cure cancer or treat your cancer completely without risk. Think very carefully before following the advice of a practitioner who tells you to stop taking conventional treatment.
- Salespeople in health food stores may not be trained complementary therapy practitioners. It's best to talk to someone on your healthcare team about the risks and benefits of any therapies a salesperson suggests.

Trust your instincts. If you're not comfortable with someone or their information, try someone else. As with all your healthcare providers, having a good relationship is important. As Karen says, "What are you looking for and what feels right to you? Yes, you're looking for credentials, for referrals. But you also have your inner knowing of what's a good match for you."

Regulation of natural health products in Canada

Many complementary therapies make use of natural health products (NHPs). Natural health products include:

- vitamins and minerals
- herbs and plants
- homeopathic medicines
- traditional medicines
- probiotics (healthy bacteria)
- other products like amino acids and essential fatty acids

The Natural Health Products Directorate, which is part of Health Canada, helps make sure that NHPs are well prepared, safe to use and helpful, and that they come with instructions on how they should be used. Some people assume that because a health product is labelled "natural," it is safe. But NHPs, like all drugs, may have side effects that can be serious. For these reasons, Health Canada has rules that govern many – but not all – NHPs.

Health Canada's rules do not cover NHPs bought in other countries. Be careful as well of buying products through Internet pharmacies, because their products might not be licensed through Health Canada. As well, Health Canada does not regulate whole plants or herbs, or products made by practitioners. For example, if a naturopathic doctor or a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner prepares a tea from herbs for you to drink, that tea is not regulated. Products that are not regulated by Health Canada may have safety concerns because:

- The wrong ingredient may be used in a formula or the amount of ingredient may vary from batch to batch.
- They may have come in contact with harmful chemicals or other drugs.
- They may not be stored, packaged or labelled properly. They may be out of date and less potent.

A practitioner may suggest that you take NHPs and may sell them to you directly. You can also buy them in many drugstores and health food stores. When buying an NHP, look for either the NPN (Natural Product Number) or DIN-HM (Drug Identification Number–Homeopathic Medicine). These numbers tell you the product is licensed by Health Canada. The label should also tell you what the product is for, the recommended dosage, the ingredients and any known negative reactions.

Health Canada also keeps a list of licensed natural health products and any notices of recall or reports of negative effects.

If you choose to use NHPs:

- Understand why you're using a product, how long you'll be using it and the evidence behind it.
- Introduce one product at a time. That way, if you have a reaction you'll know which product caused it.

- Report negative effects to MedEffect Canada, Health Canada's tracking program for negative drug reactions. This includes reporting allergic reactions, such as rashes, hives or asthma symptoms, to products. Your doctor or complementary therapy practitioner should be able to help you with this.
- Tell both your doctor and your complementary therapy practitioner about any new symptoms or changes to your health.

NHPs and cancer treatment

“ My radiation oncologist and my naturopathic doctor had a phone conversation at my request. Afterward, my radiation oncologist told me she was concerned that some of the supplements I was on might interfere with the positive benefits of radiation. She handled it so well. She said, ‘I’m giving you my opinion, but this is your decision. This is your treatment, this is your body. You need to decide what’s best for you.’ My naturopathic doctor said the same thing. In the end, I decided to stop taking the supplements during radiation and started taking them again afterwards. ~ Tamara

Natural health products can interact with conventional cancer treatments in different ways – some good, some bad. It’s hard to predict the effect of taking NHPs during cancer treatment. They could:

- lower or increase the effectiveness of conventional treatment
- interact with your cancer treatment by causing toxic side effects or by helping to reduce side effects
- affect your test results used to track the disease

For these reasons, it’s important to talk to your doctor and to your complementary therapy practitioner before taking any NHPs. They can help make sure that the NHPs you’re thinking about using are safe to take during your cancer treatment.

Some doctors and surgeons recommend that their patients stop taking NHPs before surgery or during treatment because of the risk of negative interaction. Others are comfortable with patients taking certain NHPs. In the end, the choice is yours. Karen, for example, took NHPs after – but not during – her treatment for breast cancer. “After doing some research, it made sense to me that taking supplements might be dicey during chemo,” she says. Bryan talked to both his cancer doctor and his naturopathic doctor before deciding what to do. He chose to use NHPs while having chemotherapy with the goal of helping his body handle the treatment better. “I’m on a really high dose of chemo,” he says, “and by a couple days after treatment, I’m pretty well back to normal.”

Talking to all members of your healthcare team can help you make a safe and informed decision about taking NHPs during treatment.

What about vitamin and mineral supplements?

Taking a regular-strength multivitamin and mineral supplement for your age group every day is usually okay, but check with your doctor to be sure.



Complementary therapies that may help people with cancer

This section of the booklet explains some of the more common complementary therapies used by people with cancer. We describe each therapy and some of the ways it might be helpful. We also let you know when the therapy might not be a good idea. Where possible, we provide information on the background or training of qualified practitioners or organizations that can help you find one.



Therapies can be grouped in different ways. For example, hypnosis and meditation are types of mind-body therapies. To keep things simple, we have listed them in alphabetical order, rather than by what system they are part of.

These therapies do not treat cancer

At this time, scientific evidence has not proven that any of these therapies is an effective treatment for cancer. They are included because there is some proof that they may be helpful as complementary therapies to conventional cancer treatment.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is one of the oldest medical practices in the world still in use. It has been used in China for more than 2,000 years.

Acupuncture is based on the belief that qi (pronounced *chee*), or vital energy, flows through your body along a network of channels called meridians. Qi is said to affect your spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health. The purpose of acupuncture is to keep the qi flowing well through the body so that the person

feels vital. Western scientists believe that acupuncture is effective because it releases endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers and mood boosters, and because it boosts the body's natural immune response.

Studies have found that acupuncture can help treat nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy. You may also find it helps with sleep and is useful for easing some types of cancer-related pain, hot flashes, dry mouth from radiation, fatigue and anxiety.

The most common acupuncture method uses very thin, disposable, stainless steel needles inserted through your skin at certain points on your body. The needles are left in place for a time, often for several minutes. Sterile needles are very important when you have cancer because chemotherapy and radiation therapy can weaken your immune system.

Acupuncture needles are very fine and generally don't hurt when they're inserted. Sometimes, people feel a slight pinch or as though they're being bitten by a mosquito. "I had acupuncture before and after each round of chemo," says Tamara. "You certainly feel it when the needle goes in, but it's not pain." If you don't like needles, an acupuncturist can use other ways to treat you, such as magnets or light massage.

Acupuncture is generally thought to be safe. It may not be a good idea if you have low white blood cell or platelet counts. Needles should not be used at the tumour site or in limbs affected by lymphedema (swelling caused by a buildup of lymph fluid).

It's important to have acupuncture done by a qualified practitioner who has worked with cancer patients. Several national, provincial and territorial organizations set standards of practice for acupuncture in Canada and can help you find an acupuncturist. Acupuncture is regulated in several provinces and territories.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the practice of using essential oils, mostly from plants, to change your mood or to help you feel better. Essential oils are usually very fragrant and highly concentrated. They have been used for thousands of years by various cultures for bathing, cosmetic and healing purposes.

Aromatherapy is thought to work through scent receptors in your nose, which send messages to your brain and affect heart rate, blood pressure and breathing. Essential oils are usually rubbed into your skin or absorbed from bath water. They can be inhaled through the air if the oil is put into steaming water, diffusers or humidifiers.

There are many different essential oils available. There is evidence that they may help:

- lower stress, tension and anxiety
- promote a sense of calm or well-being
- lessen pain
- ease nausea
- promote sleep

For example, inhaled peppermint, ginger and cardamom oil may ease nausea caused by chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Some oils shouldn't be used for certain symptoms or health problems. Because their scents are strong, some people may find that certain oils don't appeal to them or make their nausea worse.

A few side effects, such as skin reactions and breathing problems, have been reported with essential oils, but generally they're safe. Before using it, test the oil on a very small patch of skin to check for reactions. Essential oils can be poisonous and should not be swallowed.

The Canadian Federation of Aromatherapists (CFA) and some provincial organizations set standards of practice for aromatherapists. If an aromatherapist has the letters CAHP (for the designation Certified Aromatherapy Health Professional) after their name, this means they have passed the CFA's courses and written exams.

Art therapy

Also called expressive arts therapy or creative arts therapy

“ When I was growing up, my teachers told me not to draw because I couldn't stay in the lines, and my mother was a neat freak so I didn't do anything artistic. And then I went to an art therapy session, and I'm sitting around the table that is magnificently supplied with crayons and paint and craft supplies, and the therapist hands me a chunk of soft clay and says, 'Just feel it. Close your eyes and feel this clay and make something.' And I freaked. Everybody else was making things and I've got this ball of clay that's getting tighter and tighter and I looked at the therapist and said, 'I can't.' And she looked at me and said, 'There's a ball. Make the ball.' And so it was a difficult 15 minutes but the ball became an oval and then it became an egg and then I etched cracks in it and painted it and stuck feathers in the top and it became my birthing egg. And from that experience I was willing to go on. ~ Karen

Art therapy is based on the idea that being creative can be healing and can help you lower stress by expressing fear, anxiety or hidden emotions. You and your caregivers may find it useful for dealing with emotions about cancer. It can be very helpful for people who find it hard to express their emotions using words.

Many hospitals and cancer treatment centres now offer art sessions. An art therapist will encourage you to express feelings or emotions such as fear, anger or loneliness through painting,

drawing, sculpting or other types of artwork. You can then talk about your feelings and emotions as they relate to your art.

The Canadian Art Therapy Association and a number of provincial associations set standards of practice for art therapists.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is a type of mind-body therapy used to improve quality of life. It uses simple machines that measure certain body functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, sweating and muscle tension. Over time, biofeedback therapy may help you learn how to better control these body functions and reduce symptoms such as pain or stress.

In a biofeedback session, electrodes are attached to your skin to measure body functions. (This doesn't hurt.) A biofeedback therapist works with you on relaxation strategies like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation (tightening and then relaxing different muscle groups), guided imagery or mindfulness meditation. The biofeedback machine gives you feedback right away on how these techniques work to change your body's responses.

Using biofeedback can help your muscle-strengthening exercises work better. Research has shown that biofeedback can also be helpful after surgery if you're trying to get back urinary and bowel function (continence) and for easing some types of chronic pain. It can also relieve stress and help you feel more relaxed.

A trained, qualified professional should teach you how to use the machines and interpret changes and still follow you closely if you start using this therapy at home on your own. Biofeedback therapists are certified by the Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA).

Energy therapies

Also called energy medicine

Energy therapies focus on the energy fields that are said to flow within and around your body. They are based on the belief that changing these energy fields with gentle pressure or placing hands in or through your energy fields can affect healing and wellness.

Common forms of energy therapy include healing touch, reiki and therapeutic touch. These therapies have mainly been used to ease symptoms of cancer or side effects of treatment such as anxiety, fatigue, pain, or nausea and vomiting. Karen, for example, went to therapeutic touch sessions offered at her cancer centre. “You’re lying down, fully clothed, while the therapist guides her hands over and around your body,” she says. “There was that whole sense of being still and of healing so that I was in a positive state of mind when the chemo was being injected.”

Energy therapies are generally considered safe, and few side effects have been reported. Energy therapy practitioners are not regulated in Canada.



Guided imagery

Also called visualization

“ Guided imagery helps you to create a space between you and the cancer world you’re immersed in. It can be very helpful, especially if you’re new to a meditation practice, to have someone’s voice guiding you through a scene, helping you to feel aware and involved and focused. ~ Karen

Guided imagery is a type of mind-body therapy. You close your eyes and imagine scenes, sounds, smells or other sensations to help your body relax or to improve your health and well-being. You might imagine these scenes on your own or you can listen as a practitioner takes you through a guided imagery session. You can also find and download many guided meditations online.

There are many types of guided imagery. For people with cancer, a common method is to imagine your body fighting and beating the cancer. Another method involves imagining what colour stress or anxiety would be (such as red) and then what colour being relaxed or calm would be (such as blue).

Studies have shown that guided imagery can ease tension, stress and fatigue. It may help reduce some of the side effects of cancer treatment, including nausea and vomiting, and reduce anxiety and pain during medical tests.



Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a state of relaxed and focused attention in which you are helped by positive suggestions from a hypnotherapist. There are different kinds of hypnosis, which is a medically accepted type of mind-body therapy.

During hypnosis, a hypnotherapist leads you into a deeply relaxed state, in which you feel separate from, but still aware of, what's going on around you. Your therapist will then use suggestion to help you in different ways, such as to gain control over certain symptoms or change some behaviours.

Several studies have shown that hypnosis can help with anxiety, depression and mood in people with cancer. Hypnosis and relaxation may also be helpful in easing pain and reducing nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy.

Side effects of hypnosis may include fatigue, anxiety, confusion, fainting and dizziness. Most side effects don't last very long. Serious reactions may include seizures, lasting psychological problems and bringing back memories of earlier trauma. It's important to have hypnosis done by a professional with advanced training.

In Canada, the Association of Registered Clinical Hypnotherapists (ARCH) and the Canadian Federation of Clinical Hypnosis provide information on hypnosis and qualified practitioners.

Massage therapy

Also called therapeutic massage



When I developed a bad case of shingles following complications from radiation, massage significantly reduced the shingles pain in my legs. ~ Tamara

Massage is the treatment of the muscles and soft tissues in your body. A growing number of healthcare professionals recognize massage as a helpful complementary therapy. Some evidence shows that massage can help people with cancer, both physically and emotionally. Research has shown that massage can help reduce stress, anxiety, nausea, pain, fatigue and sleeping problems (insomnia). It is used to help ease sore, stiff muscles and pain such as headaches and low back pain. It can also improve the way blood flows through your body (circulation). Having a massage makes many people feel relaxed.

There are many types of massage, such as reflexology, deep tissue massage and lymphatic massage. They may be used alone or at the same time, but massage isn't always a good idea. Deep tissue massage may not be safe if you have osteoporosis, a bleeding disorder or cancer that has spread to the bone (bone metastasis), or if you had bone problems during cancer treatment.

Talk to your doctor or a registered massage therapist (RMT) about what type of massage is safe to use with the type of cancer you have. Massage therapists are registered in most provinces and territories. It's important to have massage done by an RMT who has experience working with people with cancer. Tamara, for example, found an RMT with special training in lymphatic drainage for people with cancer.

Meditation

“Meditation is very useful in terms of allowing yourself to be in the moment, not so pulled by the past and the future. It’s learning to let go of all that isn’t necessary or useful in that moment. ~ Anne Pitman (integrative care coordinator and yoga therapist)

Meditation is a mind-body therapy that is used to relax your body and calm your mind. It involves focusing your attention and acknowledging and then letting go of thoughts that may distract you from that focus. You can use focused breathing, repeat certain words or phrases (a mantra), or focus on an object.

Meditation may help lower anxiety, stress or blood pressure. It may lead to better sleeping habits and can help you cope with chronic pain. It may help improve your quality of life and help you feel more in control. “It definitely slows my racing mind,” says Karen, who took up meditation after she was diagnosed with cancer.

There are many different types and styles of meditation. Meditation may be done while sitting or lying down. There are also moving forms of meditation such as tai chi, qigong and walking meditation. Mindfulness meditation, or practising mindfulness, involves bringing awareness to each particular moment without judgment or the need to change it. This approach can help you cope with pain or stress.

Meditation can be self-directed or guided by trained professionals such as yoga instructors, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists or other healthcare professionals. You can meditate alone or as part of a group. Many community groups and yoga studios offer meditation groups. Your cancer centre may also offer a meditation group or mindfulness-based stress reduction practice.

Problems rarely occur with meditation, but some people have become disoriented or anxious when trying it. Talk to your doctor before starting any type of meditation that involves moving your joints and muscles, such as qigong or martial arts.

Music therapy

Music therapy is a creative outlet that promotes healing and enhances quality of life. You don't need to have any musical ability or experience to benefit from it. During music therapy, you listen to music or use instruments under the guidance of a music therapist. Along with helping you find ways to express or cope with difficult emotions, it can help ease physical symptoms. Music therapy in a group can help you connect with others who are going through a similar experience.

There is evidence that music therapy can help you lower pain and relieve nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy. It may also help you ease stress and give you an overall sense of well-being. Some studies have found that music therapy can lower your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate as your brain and body respond to the rhythm and beat of the music.

You can find an accredited music therapist, or MTA, through the Canadian Association for Music Therapy.



Naturopathic medicine

Naturopathic medicine focuses on supporting and stimulating the body's ability to heal itself. It takes a holistic approach, which means that it focuses on the whole person rather than on a person's illness.

Naturopathic doctors (NDs) practise this form of medicine that combines modern scientific knowledge with traditional and natural therapies. They are trained in a variety of therapies, including plant-based medicine, clinical nutrition, traditional Chinese medicine, massage and acupuncture. An ND can also help coordinate your complementary care and discuss your complementary therapies with your doctor and with other practitioners.

An ND is sometimes called a naturopath, but sometimes people who call themselves naturopaths have not trained as naturopathic doctors. It's important to know about the background of the practitioner you're seeing.

In Canada, naturopathic doctors go through a full-time, 4-year training program. Some NDs have extra training, knowledge and experience in cancer care. These doctors have the designation Fellow to the American Board of Naturopathic Oncologists (FABNO).

Naturopathic medicine is regulated in many Canadian provinces and territories. To find an ND, you can check your provincial or territorial association of NDs or the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors.

Tai chi

Tai chi (pronounced *tie chee*) is a mind-body therapy. This ancient Chinese martial art combines moving your body slowly with meditating and breathing exercises to improve health and well-being. Many practitioners believe that tai chi helps energy, or qi, flow throughout the body.

Like most moderate exercise, tai chi can improve your muscle tone, agility and flexibility. The breathing exercises may help lower your stress. Early research has shown that tai chi improves quality of life in breast cancer survivors.

People of all ages can do tai chi as the movements are gentle and put little stress on the body. If you have muscle or bone problems, talk to your doctor before starting.



Yoga



I found a very good restorative yoga teacher. Without any skill, with a very unfit body and having just come through the treatments, I found that it was a way to move, get stronger and feel more comfortable in my body. I had always lived in my head, and yoga helped me with that mind-body connection. It was a godsend. ~ Karen

Yoga is a form of exercise that uses a series of stretches and poses, breathing exercises and meditation. There are many types of yoga. Popular forms for people with cancer are hatha yoga (a gentle blend of standing, sitting and lying poses) and restorative yoga (mostly lying poses with the benefit of bolsters, pillows and blocks for support). Depending on how you feel, a certified yoga teacher will be able to suggest anything from gentle stretches and moderate postures to a more quiet practice, where the emphasis is on breath and meditation.

Some studies have found that yoga is helpful for people with cancer who have problems with sleep. Other research has shown that yoga can be used to control blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, metabolism and body temperature. This can improve your physical fitness, flexibility and well-being, lower your stress and help you feel more relaxed.

Talk to your doctor before starting any type of therapy that means moving your joints and muscles in a way that you're not used to. Vigorous practices of yoga may not be a good idea if you have bone metastases and are at risk of fractures. Hot yoga, a vigorous practice done in a very hot room (at least 40 degrees Celsius), may not be suitable for people having cancer treatment or at risk for lymphedema.

The Yoga Alliance and the Canadian Yoga Association set standards for training students and teachers of yoga. Look for a yoga teacher with some training in working with people with cancer.

Putting it all together

“ Mainstream cancer care is totally focused on the disease and treating it. And I am very grateful for the care that I got that way. At the same time, there’s this whole other body of knowledge that’s all about supporting the body in its fight against disease and to be as healthy as it can possibly be. Why wouldn’t we bring the best of those worlds together?
~ Tamara

When it comes to complementary therapies for cancer, it’s important to find a path that feels right for you – the therapy that meets your needs, a qualified practitioner you trust, the level of commitment and energy you’re comfortable with.

Remember that your needs may change over time. Every once in a while, think about how the therapies you’ve chosen are working for you. You may want to try something different or stop using therapies that no longer feel useful or right to you. Your doctor and your complementary therapy practitioners may be able to help you with these decisions. The evidence for complementary therapies is changing all the time, and it’s important to stay up to date on the latest information.

You may decide to keep going with your chosen therapies even after conventional treatment finishes. Some people first try complementary therapies while on their cancer journey but find that they help with more than just cancer.

“ It felt like a time to be curious and open to new things. And the things that I tried felt healing – as though they brought me back to myself as a whole person and not just somebody with cancer. Trying complementary therapies just seemed like an opportunity to enhance my life. ~ Karen

Resources

Canadian Cancer Society

We're here for you.

When you have questions about treatment, diagnosis, care or services, we will help you find answers.

Call our toll-free number **1 888 939-3333**.



Ask a trained cancer information specialist your questions about cancer.

Call us or email info@cis.cancer.ca.



Connect with people online to join discussions, get support and help others.

Visit CancerConnection.ca.



Browse Canada's most trusted online source of information on all types of cancer.

Visit cancer.ca.

Our services are free and confidential. Many are available in other languages through interpreters.

Tell us what you think

Email cancerinfo@cancer.ca and tell us how we can make this publication better.

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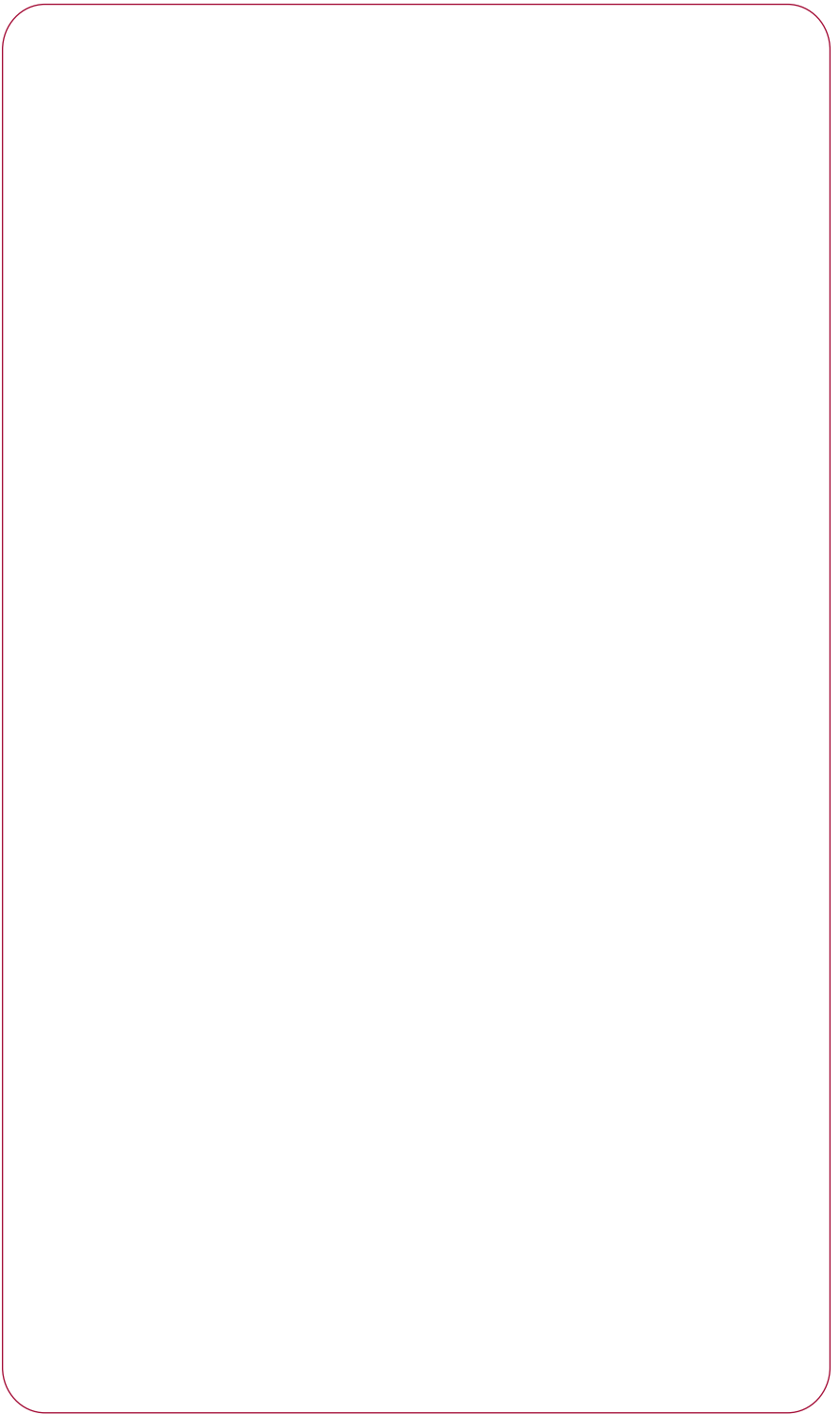
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What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer and our services or to make a donation.



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