



Complementary Therapies and Cancer

You may hear about, or become interested in, complementary therapies. There are many therapies available. This fact sheet has information to help you make informed and safe choices.

Conventional cancer therapies are evidence-based and scientifically proven to be safe and effective. The main types are surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and immunotherapy. They are also often referred to as mainstream or conventional medical treatments.

Complementary therapies are used together with conventional medical therapies. Complementary therapies aim to support and enhance a person's quality of life and improve wellbeing. They do not aim to treat or cure cancer. Instead, they are used to help control symptoms such as pain and fatigue.

What are alternative therapies?

Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional medical treatments. They are unproven and have not been scientifically tested, even though they are often promoted as "cancer cures". Alternative therapies may cause harm or suffering to those who use them instead of conventional medical treatments.

Examples of alternative therapies include naturopathy, immune therapy, homeopathy, Chinese herbs and megavitamins.

Types of complementary therapies

The following complementary therapies are those most often used by people with cancer. You may choose to use one or more of the therapies.

Touch therapies involve working with the body and include acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology and massage.

Mind-body therapies are designed to enhance the mind's capacity to affect the body's function and symptoms. These therapies include meditation, visualisation, guided imagery and hypnosis.

Talking therapies provide an opportunity for emotional support. This can be one-on-one with a trained counselor, or in a group of people who come together to share their experiences and support each other.

Peer support programs involve one-on-one support with another person who has had a similar experience.

Things to do before considering a complementary therapy

Some complementary therapies may not be recommended, as they interfere with your conventional treatment and/or worsen your side-effects. You should always talk to your doctor before using any complementary therapy.

You may want to ask a therapist the following questions:

- Will this therapy affect my conventional medical treatment?
- What does the therapy aim to achieve?
- Is this therapy specifically used for cancer patients or is it used for other diseases?
- Are there any side-effects?
- Who will be involved in delivering the therapy? What are their qualifications, and are they registered with a professional organisation?
- What are the costs of the therapy and are they covered by my health insurance provider?

You should always feel safe, comfortable and respected when you are having a complementary therapy. Your state or territory Cancer Council may offer complementary therapies and can assist in answering any questions you may have.

Where can I get reliable information?

- **Cancer Council NSW 13 11 20. Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia. www.cancercouncil.com.au**
- **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) 13 14 50**