

Complementary and Alternative Medicine



A guide for people affected by cancer



Copyright © 2014 Cancer Society of New Zealand Inc,
PO Box 12700, Wellington 6011.
Second Edition 2014
ISBN 978-0-9941076-0-2

Publications Statement

Our aim is to provide easy-to-understand and accurate information on cancer and its treatments. Our Living with Cancer information booklets are reviewed and updated by cancer doctors, specialist nurses, and other relevant health professionals to ensure the information is reliable, evidence-based, and up-to-date. The booklets are also reviewed by consumers to ensure they meet the needs of people with cancer and their carers.

Other titles from the Cancer Society of New Zealand/Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

Booklets

Advanced Cancer/Matepukupuku Maukaha
Bowel Cancer/Matepukupuku Puku Hamuti
Bowel Cancer and Bowel Function: Practical advice
Breast Cancer/Te Matepukupuku o ngā Ū
Cancer Clinical Trials
Cancer in the Family: Talking to your children
Coping with Cancer: A guide for people with cancer
Chemotherapy/Hahau
Eating Well During Cancer Treatment/Kia Pai te Kai te wā Maimoatanga Matepukupuku
Emotions and Cancer
Getting on with life after treatment/Te hoki anō ki tō toioranga whai muri i te maimoatanga
Got Water?/He Wai?
Kanesa o le susu/Breast Cancer (Samoan)
Lung Cancer/Mate Pukupuku Pūkahukahu
Melanoma/Tonapuku
Prostate Cancer/Matepukupuku Repeure
Radiation Treatment/Haumanu Iraruke
Secondary Breast Cancer/Matepukupuku Tuarua ā-Ū
Sexuality and Cancer/Hōkakatanga me te Matepukupuku
Talking about grief and loss
Cancer of the Uterus/Matepukupuku o te Kopū

Brochures

Being Active When You Have Cancer
Bowel Cancer Awareness
Gynaecological Cancers
Questions You May Wish To Ask
Talking to a friend with cancer
Thermography

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

This booklet provides information about complementary and alternative therapies (also known as CAM).

Being diagnosed with cancer is a difficult time and it may feel like things are out of control. Many people choose treatments suggested by their medical team and do not wish to explore other types of treatment. Some consider other forms of treatment to add to or replace their hospital medical care (offered by their doctors). These are called complementary and alternative treatments.

This booklet uses the terms medicines, methods, treatments and therapies to describe complementary and alternative medicine.



What are complementary and alternative medicines?

People may want to use complementary medicines with their hospital treatment to help them feel better and cope during treatment. A complementary therapist will not claim to be able to cure your cancer.

Alternative therapists will offer alternative medicines instead of a hospital treatment. Often, people promoting alternative medicines claim they will cure your cancer or work better than your regular cancer treatment. There is no scientific evidence to support or prove these claims are true. Hospital treatments have had years of scientific research and testing to prove they work. Choosing to have alternative therapies over hospital medicine may risk your chances of recovery (getting better).

How can complementary medicines help?

Complementary therapies may help you cope with your cancer treatment by:

- improving your quality of life.
- improving your general health and wellbeing.
- giving you a sense of control during your cancer experience.
- helping control anxiety (fear), stress, difficulty sleeping, and depression.
- helping reduce symptoms of cancer and side-effects of chemotherapy or radiation treatment, for example, pain, nausea, loss of appetite, breathlessness, constipation, diarrhoea, or fatigue (extreme tiredness).

Some medicines may make your hospital treatments less effective.

Talk about any therapies with your doctor and tell your CAM therapist about any hospital cancer treatments you're using.

Do alternative therapies help?

Alternative therapies are used in place of hospital medical treatments. Many of these therapies do not have the support of health professionals because there is no proof they work. The Cancer Society of New Zealand does not recommend using alternative therapies in place of hospital treatments. If you are thinking about using alternative therapy we suggest you talk about it with your doctor.



What are the different types of complementary therapies?

There are many complementary therapies that can be used with hospital treatments. There are five main groups of therapies:

Body therapies

Body therapies work by moving different parts of your body. Therapies people often use include:

- **Gentle massage:** used to help circulation(blood flow), ease tension (loosen tight muscles) and lower stress.
- **Reflexology:** uses pressure points on the feet and hands to remove pain felt in different parts of the body.
- **Osteopathy:** therapy is based on improving your health through gently moving bones and muscles to ease pain and help you feel better.
- **Chiropractic therapy:** This therapy is based on moving parts of the spinal column (the back).

For pain management “*evidence does not support chiropractic manipulation for cancer patients*”.*

* Cassileth, Barrie et al. ‘Complementary therapies for cancer pain.’ In Current Pain and Headache Reports. Volume 11, Number 4. New York: Current Medicine Group LLC, 2007.

Mind-body therapies

These therapies come from the belief that you can affect the health of your body through the power of your mind. Commonly used examples are:

- **Hypnosis:** use of suggestion in the mind to help with healing or mental wellbeing.
- **Art therapy:** therapy that uses creative ways to help cope with your feelings.
- **Meditation:** relaxation and breathing methods to relax you and make you feel calm.
- **Yoga:** A set of exercises that use movement and breathing to control the body and mind.
- **Biofeedback:** use of technology(machines), such as heart rate monitors to teach people how certain body parts, systems, and how they work are affected by their where we live.

How much does CAM cost?

Some complementary therapies can cost a lot of money. Make sure that you ask how much the therapy will cost before you make your decision. It is also worthwhile asking your cancer care team if the hospital, Cancer Society or hospice offer any free or low-cost complementary treatments.

Energy-based therapies

These therapies are based on the belief that the body is made up of energy fields that can be used to heal or promote wellness. Examples include:

- **Reiki and Therapeutic touch:** the belief is that therapists balance inner vital energy by using their hands to move over energy fields in the person's body.
- **Tai Chi:** a Chinese martial art combining controlled breathing, concentration and balance with slow and gentle movements.



Traditional Medicines

New Zealand and many other countries have cultural beliefs and practices that have developed over time. These are generally based on healing the whole person. Common examples in this country include:

Traditional Māori healing

Traditional healing has been an integral part of Māori culture since time began. Values, belief systems and teachings from kaumatua and tohunga alike, have seen Māori focus on total wellbeing encompassing taha tinana, taha hinengaro, taha wairua and taha whānau (the physical domain, the domain of mind and behaviour, the spiritual domain, and the family or social domain).

When Māori are faced with tough decisions in health care or treatment particularly, some tend to opt for traditional healing methods. These can include rongoā Māori, romiromi or mirimiri to name a few customary remedies based on native plants, massage therapy and spiritual

healing. If you are thinking about using these treatments, please discuss this with your clinical treatment team. Both parties will be aiming to provide you with the best possible care which has minimal side effects.

If you have difficulty expressing your needs to any of your treatment providers, find someone to advocate on your behalf so both traditional Māori healers and hospital treatment specialists are able to work together to support you on your cancer journey.

Pacific traditional healing

Traditional healing has been long used by Pacific people to help in their recovery. It involves taking a holistic approach to treating the person, where their mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing are looked after together, rather than as separate parts. The treatment offered to each person can vary, depending on their needs. Medicinal plants and herbs may be used during the treatment process, as well as stones, and massage. Pacific people may choose to complement Western treatment with traditional healing.

If you choose to include traditional healing as part of your treatment, please make sure you let your doctors know. They may ask questions about the types of treatments your traditional healer is using. This can be difficult to explain sometimes, especially if it is tricky to work out which English words to use to translate certain Pacific concepts.

If you find it hard to tell your doctor or nurses about the traditional healing methods being used by your healer, it

may be helpful if your doctor or nurses could talk directly with the traditional healer or even a close family member who knows what treatments you are receiving.

It may sometimes feel like the doctor and the traditional healer don't need to know about what each other is doing, but it is important that they do since they are both helping you recover. It is especially important to make sure that the medicines you are taking are working harmoniously with each other and not likely to cause you any side effects. Remember, traditional plant medicines can sometimes react with Western drugs. Your doctor may also want to make sure that the traditional massages are okay to use, particularly around the chest area if you have just had an operation.

It is possible to use both Western and traditional medicine as part of your healing journey. Both have their place and benefits. To help make sure that you recover as quickly and safely as possible, please make sure your doctors and healers know what each other is doing. This way, both your doctor and traditional healer can work together in helping you recover.

Acupuncture

An ancient Chinese practice that uses small needles to stimulate points on the body to help healing, remove pain and nausea (make you feel better when your stomach is feeling sick).

Homeopathy

Based on the theory of ‘treating like with like’. To treat an illness, a homeopathic therapist (homeopath) uses tiny doses of a substance that in large doses would cause the symptoms of the illness.

Homeopathic remedies are made from plant, mineral and/or animals. They are diluted (thinned) usually using water, sometimes alcohol and shaken many times until there is little, if any, of the original substance left.

Source: CancerHelp UK 2009

Naturopathy

An approach to medicine that is based on the body’s ability to heal itself. Naturopaths use many other therapies, including herbal medicines, homeopathy and counselling (healing talk).

Talking to your doctor about CAM

Some people do not talk about CAM with their doctors because they may not support their choice.

Doctors now understand that people want to look at other options and are willing to talk about this with them.

Doctors can only prescribe medicines that have been well-tried and tested. They sometimes have concerns that people spend a lot of money on treatments that have no proven benefit (nobody can prove they work) or could even do harm and affect hospital cancer treatment.

People may choose to delay their cancer treatment in favour of CAM and may miss the chance to get the best possible result from their treatment.

Where can you get more information?

Your doctor or cancer nurse may be able to give you a list of complementary therapists in your area.

The internet may be helpful in your search for information on CAM. However, it is important that the information you base your decisions on comes from a trustworthy source.

Suggested websites

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cam/thinking-about-CAM>

Thinking About Complementary and Alternative Medicine:
A Guide for People With Cancer

National Center for Complementary and Alternative (NCCAM)

<http://nccam.nih.gov/>

NCCAM conduct and support research and provide information about complementary health products and practices.

American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/>

<http://www.cancer.org/search/index?QueryText=complementary+and+alternative+treatment>

A very thorough overview of CAM with good information on treatments. Some good advice given to those searching for a CAM practitioner that translates well to the New Zealand setting.

The Society for Integrative Oncology

<http://www.integrativeonc.org/>

The mission of the Society for Integrative Oncology is to advance evidence-based, comprehensive, integrative healthcare to improve the lives of people affected by cancer.

Information, support, and research

The Cancer Society of New Zealand offers information and support services to people affected by cancer. Printed material is available on specific cancers and treatments. Information for living with cancer is also available.

The Cancer Society is a major funder of cancer research in New Zealand. The aim of research is to determine the causes, prevention, and effective methods of treating various types of cancer.

The Society also undertakes health promotion through programmes, such as those encouraging SunSmart behaviour, healthy eating, physical activity, and discouraging smoking.

Acknowledgements

The Cancer Society would like to thank for their reviews, advice, and contributions:

Simon Allan

Medical Oncologist, Palmerston North Hospital

Associate Professor Chris Atkinson

Oncologist, St George's Hospital, Christchurch and the Cancer Society of New Zealand's Medical Director

Cheryl Macdonald

Clinical Nurse Specialist Breast Care, Midcentral DHB

Jenny Collett

Physiotherapist/Lymphoedema Therapist, Palmerston North

Kate Veleski, Julie Holt and Michelle Gundersen-Reid

Cancer Society Information Nurses

Sarah Stacy-Baynes

National Information Manager, National Office,
Cancer Society of New Zealand

Volunteers

Many thanks to the Cancer Society volunteers who agreed to be photographed for our booklet cover.

We appreciate your support

Many Cancer Society services would not be possible without the generous support of many New Zealanders. You can make a donation by phoning **0900 31 111**, through our website at **www.cancernz.org.nz** or by contacting your local Cancer Society.

Notes

Notes



www.cancernz.org.nz

ANY CANCER, ANY QUESTION 0800 CANCER (226 237) Cancer Information Helpline

