

*Understanding* Cancer and  
Complementary  
Therapies

*A guide for patients with cancer*

## Understanding cancer and complementary therapies

This booklet has been written to help you understand more about cancer and complementary therapies. It has been prepared and checked by medical doctors, complementary therapists, other relevant specialists, nurses and patients. The information in this booklet is an agreed view on the benefits and risks of complementary therapies for patients with cancer. (You can make a note below of the contact names and information that you may need.)

Specialist nurse Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Family doctor Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Surgeon Hospital Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Medical oncologist Hospital Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Radiation oncologist Hospital Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Complementary therapist Tel \_\_\_\_\_

If you like, you can also add:

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



This booklet has been produced by Nursing Services in the Irish Cancer Society to meet the need for improved communication, information and support for cancer patients and their families throughout diagnosis and treatment. We would like to thank all those patients, families and professionals whose support and advice made this publication possible.

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This booklet offers information only. The inclusion of any complementary or alternative therapy does not mean it is endorsed by the Irish Cancer Society. All therapies as described in the booklet should be used with caution by cancer patients.

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## Introduction

This booklet has been written to help you understand more about complementary and alternative therapies. The Irish Cancer Society recognises that this is a controversial area and that there is a great need for information and clarity on the subject. The Society also recognises that cancer patients are often reluctant to tell their doctors and nurses if they are using therapies other than conventional ones. By reading this booklet, we hope you will be encouraged to talk to your doctor and nurse.

For anyone being treated for cancer and thinking of using complementary or alternative therapies, the Society believes that caution is needed. It is far too simple to believe that these therapies are either all good or all bad. The aim of this booklet is to guide you on what to consider before trying various therapies and where possible to become informed about that therapy. The Society does not wish to alarm or frighten people if they have never had complementary therapies before. Complementary therapies can be safe when given by well-qualified therapists who work together with your doctors.

A very brief description is given of some of the main types of therapies used in Ireland, how these therapies are meant to work, and some of their known benefits and risks. Just because a therapy appears to have no risks does not mean there are no risks. And remember that natural does not always mean safe.



### Conventional therapies

These are treatments that doctors use most often to treat people. In the case of cancer, they include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone treatments. They are treatments that have mostly been scientifically tested and have a long history of use.



### Complementary therapies

These are therapies that can be used together with conventional medicine. They are used to promote well-being and to manage symptoms related to cancer and its treatment. They include meditation, relaxation, visualisation, gentle massage, aromatherapy, reflexology, nutrition therapy, Shiatsu, yoga, acupuncture and hypnotherapy. They are not used to cure cancer.



### Alternative therapies

These are therapies that are used instead of conventional medicine. They are believed to promote well-being and health, manage symptoms related to cancer, and treat or cure cancer. They include diet therapy, megavitamin therapy and herbalism. Most doctors believe that such treatments cannot cure or control cancer.



### Talk to your doctor and nurse

It is very important for you to be open with your doctor and nurse about any therapy that you are taking or thinking of taking. This is particularly so if you are receiving cancer treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or hormone therapies. Some therapies are known to interact with cancer treatments. By telling your doctor and nurse, they will be able to work with your complementary therapist fully and safely. Nowadays it is possible for all to work together.

>>> Let your doctor know if you are taking any products, especially if you are receiving chemotherapy, radiotherapy or hormone therapies.

### Scientific evidence

Part of the controversy about complementary and alternative therapies is that it is very hard to prove scientifically if these therapies are helpful. The benefit of some of these therapies has been proven for certain uses, yet in many cases it has not. Claims about the benefits of these therapies sometimes come from personal stories or what's called

anecdotal evidence. From their own experience people report how some therapies worked for them while others did not. Even though some research has been done in the area, more high-quality studies are needed.

### **Qualifications and regulation**

The area of complementary and alternative therapies is only now being regulated in Ireland. Before that it was very hard to check how much training people had. Qualifications and training can vary a good deal among therapists and practitioners, so do be wary. Always check what qualifications a therapist has with their regulatory body, if it exists. See the back of this booklet for more information about the regulatory bodies for specific therapies.

### **Cost of treatments**

Be cautious too about the cost of treatment. The cost in some cases can be very expensive. Diets in particular can be costly and may be of little or no benefit to you.

### **Other therapies**

Sometimes a particular therapy can be more popular than at other times. It is likely that a therapy you are interested in is not listed in this booklet. In this case, contact your GP, cancer support centre, the Irish Cancer Society or any of the organisations at the back of this booklet.

If you do not understand something that has been written in the booklet, you can also call the National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700, Action Breast Cancer 1800 30 90 40 or the Prostate Cancer Information Service 1800 380 380.

We hope that this booklet will be of use not only to you and your family and friends but also to health professionals and complementary therapists.

## **What does that word mean?**

<b>Alternative medicine</b>	A way of promoting health and well-being that has a different philosophy and viewpoint from conventional medicine. The therapies are used instead of conventional medicine.
<b>Anecdotal evidence</b>	Information passed by word-of-mouth but not recorded scientifically, such as personal stories.
<b>Antioxidants</b>	Chemicals such as vitamins, enzymes and minerals which protect the body from other chemicals called free radicals that cause cell damage. Antioxidants are found in foods such as berries, broccoli, tomatoes, red grapes, garlic, spinach, tea and carrots. Well-known antioxidants include vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E. See also free radicals.
<b>Bodywork</b>	A term that refers to therapies such as massage, deep tissue manipulation, etc. that aim to improve the structure and functioning of the human body.
<b>CAM</b>	Complementary and alternative medicine.
<b>Chemotherapy</b>	A treatment to cure or control cancer using drugs.
<b>Complementary medicine</b>	A way of promoting health and well-being using therapies that can be used alongside conventional medicine.
<b>Conventional medicine</b>	A way of treating people based on scientific evidence.
<b>Eastern medicine</b>	This is a broad term for therapies that began in Asia, e.g. China, Tibet, Japan, India and Thailand. These therapies are generally not based on scientific evidence but have been used for centuries. They

	focus on the energy system of the human body and the need for balance and harmony.
<b>Energy</b>	Energy in complementary and alternative medicine usually refers to a non-physical form of energy called <i>life energy</i> , <i>prana</i> or <i>chi (qi)</i> . It is believed to be the essence of life in a spiritual way. Health exists when it flows well and illness develops when it is 'blocked' or imbalanced.
<b>Essential oil</b>	An oily liquid that is taken from some plants by distillation or cold pressing. The word essential refers to the fragrant essence of the plant.
<b>Free radicals</b>	Highly reactive chemicals that often contain oxygen or nitrogen. They are formed naturally in the body as a byproduct of chemical reactions. Because they can cause cell damage they are linked to cancer.
<b>Herbalism</b>	A form of alternative medicine that uses plants and simple extracts of plants to heal the whole body.
<b>Herbal medicinal product</b>	A medicine containing only plants, simple extracts (tinctures) or standard extracts of plants.
<b>Herbal medicine</b>	The use of plants to treat illness and promote well-being. Like medicines, they can be given in many forms, such as liquids, infusions, tablets, creams and ointments. Also known as phytotherapy.
<b>Herbal remedy</b>	Herbs and plants used to treat illness. See also herbal medicinal product.
<b>Holistic</b>	An approach to health that considers the whole body and environment when

	offering treatment. It focuses on the mind, body and spirit of a person rather than on the body and disease only.
<b>Homeopathy</b>	A system of medicine where remedies are highly diluted solutions of plants, minerals or animals. It is based on the theory that 'like cures like'. It suggests that a substance when given in large doses produces the symptoms of an illness, and cures that illness when given in very small doses.
<b>Home remedy</b>	Foods or common household items that are used to treat an illness or ailment. Usually it arises from tradition or habit.
<b>Integrative medicine</b>	This combines conventional medicine with complementary therapies that are safe and effective.
<b>Metabolism</b>	All the chemical changes that take place in the body. These occur when food is taken in to make energy and allow the body to grow.
<b>Natural products</b>	Products that occur in nature. This does not mean that they are safe but that they are naturally occurring medicines.
<b>Naturopathy</b>	An approach to natural healing that uses many different methods, e.g. homeopathy. It avoids surgery and drugs.
<b>Orthodox medicine</b>	Another name for conventional or standard medicine.
<b>Physiotherapy</b>	The use of physical means – massage, exercise, heat or electricity – to relieve pain, restore movement and muscle strength. It is based on medical science and part of conventional medicine.

<b>Physical therapy</b>	Another name for physiotherapy (especially in the USA).
<b>Phytotherapy</b>	The use of herbal remedies (herbal medicinal products) to heal the body, e.g. St John's Wort used to treat mild depression.
<b>Placebo effect</b>	This is something positive that occurs when an inactive or harmless substance (pill, liquid, powder or injection) or therapy is given to a patient. It produces an effect, not due to the drug or therapy, but because the patient expects something positive will happen. It includes the power of suggestion.
<b>Practitioner</b>	A person who performs conventional, complementary or alternative therapies.
<b>Radiotherapy</b>	A treatment for cancer using high-energy X-rays.
<b>Standard medicine</b>	Another name for conventional medicine.
<b>Therapist</b>	A person skilled in a particular type of therapy.
<b>Traditional medicine</b>	This term can have two meanings. (1) Medical techniques developed and used before the age of modern medicine. These can include herbal medicine, traditional Chinese medicine and homeopathy. (2) The term is sometimes used to describe modern medicine, especially by those offering alternative therapies.
<b>Wellness care</b>	Another name for complementary therapies.
<b>Western medicine</b>	Therapies that began and developed in Europe and North America, and which are based on scientific evidence.



# Choosing complementary or alternative therapies

## Why choose other therapies?

There are many reasons why people with cancer choose to use complementary or alternative therapies. Some may want to help relieve the symptoms of cancer or the side-effects of treatment. In particular they may want help dealing with fear, anxiety, hopelessness, changes in body image or stress. They may be looking for a more holistic way of treating cancer that will affect their whole body. Others may want to find the energy and power to fight cancer. In some cases, people may want to prolong their life. A small number may in fact be hoping for a cure for cancer.

Very often people are motivated to use other therapies because of a desire to feel hopeful and better able to face the future. They are searching for ways to improve their quality of life. Sometimes people are drawn to such therapies because they match their own beliefs about health and illness.

### Complementary therapies

People may turn to complementary therapies because they want a chance to focus on their spiritual and emotional well-being. They may feel the need for more 'touch, talk and time'. With that patients can feel more in control of their illness. Others may want help with physical side-effects like fatigue and nausea. Many cancer patients turn to complementary therapies for the enjoyment and relaxation they bring too. This is especially so when they are recommended by their doctors and nurses as part of their overall care.

### Alternative therapies

Dissatisfaction with conventional medicine may lead some patients to use alternative therapies. They may think that chemotherapy drugs are too 'toxic' for their body and prefer to use what they think are natural therapies instead.

They may feel that conventional medicine has failed to focus on their spiritual and emotional well-being. For others they may feel that their doctor or nurse has little time to discuss other treatment options with them. They may want a less clinical but more personal approach, which they feel they may get from an alternative practitioner.

### What are my expectations?

While people may have many expectations about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), some may be realised and others not. Media reports of dramatic improvements after using complementary or alternative therapies are often unrealistic. In practice, no CAM therapy has been proven to cure cancer. However, in many cases, depending on the therapy, it may improve or help how you cope with cancer. With some therapies you can relax in an environment that is welcoming, warm and safe. There may be some benefits to your immune system by decreasing stress in this way. As a result, you may actually feel better. And that can make all the difference to you.

## Advice when choosing a therapist / practitioner

If you are thinking of visiting a therapist or practitioner, it is a good idea to reflect on it beforehand and choose one carefully. A series of questions is provided here that you can ask the practitioner, your medical doctor and even yourself. These questions will help you focus on what to expect from the therapy and what is involved.

Do ask your practitioner, nurse or doctor these kinds of questions – it is always better to ask than to worry about something later. Many cancer centres now have support units attached to them that offer complementary therapies and can give information about therapists in your area.

### What should I say to my doctor?

- Talk to him/her if you have a question about a particular therapy.
- Ask if he/she can recommend any therapies that might be safe and useful for you.



- Ask your doctor or nurse to suggest a therapist or speak with someone who knows about the therapy in question.
- Tell him/her if you are using any therapies.
- Show your doctor, nurse or pharmacist any tablets, remedies or supplements you are taking yourself or given to you by a therapist. Bring them with you when visiting the hospital, surgery or pharmacy.

### What should I do before I see a therapist / practitioner?

- Contact the professional organisation of the therapy in question to get the names of practitioners who are certified and registered. Ask what are the practitioner's training and experience.
- Ask your doctor or nurse at your hospital or cancer centre if they can help you find a practitioner. There may be a medical social worker, psychologist or physiotherapist who can help you too.
- Ask if your hospital keeps lists of cancer support centres or has staff who can suggest people.
- Check with your health insurance company or the Health Service Executive (HSE) if they cover the therapy in question.

### What general questions should I ask the therapist / practitioner?

- What types of therapies do you practise?
- What are your training and qualifications? If you want to confirm the answer, ask who issues the licence or which organisation are they joined/registered with. Ring the organisation to check. If the practitioner is not registered, do not visit them.
- Are you licensed or registered to practise this kind of therapy in Ireland? Again, ring the organisation to double check.
- Do you have insurance to practise this therapy?
- Will you work with my cancer specialist and GP? If your practitioner does not wish to work with your cancer specialist, choose a different practitioner who will.
- Do you see other patients with my type of cancer?
- Does your therapy have a spiritual part that I should be aware of that might conflict with my religious or spiritual beliefs?

>>> If your practitioner/therapist does not wish to work with your cancer specialist, choose a different practitioner who will.

### What questions about the therapy should I ask the therapist / practitioner?

- How can this therapy help me? What benefits can I expect from this therapy?
- Is this therapy widely available or are you the only practitioner giving it?
- Do you have information I can read about the therapy?
- Do you know of studies that prove it helps?
- What are the risks and possible side-effects of this therapy?
- Do the known benefits outweigh the risks?
- Will this therapy interfere with my cancer treatment?
- How long will I be on the therapy?
- How soon can I expect results?
- What happens if I get no benefit? What if I think the therapy is not working?
- Is this therapy part of a clinical trial? If so, who is sponsoring the trial?
- Are there any reasons why I should not use the therapy?
- How much will it cost?
- What are the Latin names of the products you are prescribing for me? (especially if herbal products are being used).

### What information should I tell the therapist / practitioner?

- Your full medical history – including any illnesses in the past and treatments you received
- If you are receiving any cancer treatments
- If you are taking medications / supplements – prescribed by a doctor or other complementary or alternative practitioner, or ones that you are taking yourself

- If you are pregnant
- Any up-to-date information that your practitioner should know
- Information about your lifestyle.

### Questions to ask yourself about the therapist/ practitioner

- Do I feel comfortable with this person?
- Do I like how the office looks and feels?
- Do I like the staff?
- Does the practitioner support standard cancer treatments?
- How far am I prepared to travel for treatment?
- Is it easy to get an appointment?
- Do the appointment times suit me?
- Is the cost of the therapy excessive?
- Will my health insurance cover the cost of the therapy?

## Frequently asked questions

**Q1** I don't want to tell my cancer specialist/GP that I am taking something else or having a different treatment. But I'm afraid in case I have a reaction. What should I do?

**A1** Some therapies may not be safe if you are receiving conventional treatment for cancer or other medical conditions. It is always best to check with your doctor if a therapy is safe for you. That way your therapist can work fully with your doctor.

**Q2** I can't seem to find any information on [my therapy]. I've asked in the support group and with some patients on the day ward. Where else can I check?

**A2** Contact the Cancer Information Service 1800 200 700 for more specific information. Also, check the back of this booklet for other reliable sources of information. Your cancer centre may have a support unit that can give you advice too.

**Q3** How can I find out if the claims about a new therapy being effective are true?

**A3** Sometimes it can be hard to find out if a therapy is effective or not. Don't judge a therapy or product by only reading the manufacturer's or provider's claims. Look at how they describe the therapy. Certain types of language may sound reasonable and impressive but may not be backed up by experience and scientific evidence. Be cautious of words such as 'innovation', 'quick cure', 'secret formula', 'miracle cure', 'non-toxic', 'exclusive product' or 'new discovery'. Contact the Cancer Information Service 1800 200 700 if you are unsure about a particular therapy.

**Q4** The person I am attending for [my therapy] has told me to stop having chemotherapy. I think my doctor will be angry with me if I stop. What should I do?

**A4** The only person who should decide to stop your chemotherapy is you together with your cancer specialist. Only by discussing it with your doctor will you be fully informed about what can happen if you decide to stop treatment. If your therapist advises you to stop, they should be reported to their regulatory body.

**Q5** You say that the practitioner should be charging a fair price. But what is a fair price? I'm willing to pay any price for a therapy that gives me hope.

**A5** Check with the therapist's professional organisation to see what price range you can expect to pay for a particular treatment. See the back of this booklet for the contact details of the various organisations. It is important to find a price that is acceptable to you.

**Q6** I have a growth on my leg but my therapist has advised me not to go to my doctor but to have their treatment instead. What should I do?

**A6** Anyone who has a medical problem should discuss it with their GP first. In general, complementary or alternative therapists are not qualified to medically diagnose conditions or give advice on medical treatment. However, many complementary therapists will work and co-operate with your doctor, so be wary of those who advise you to avoid conventional medicine.

## Your own questions

1

Answer

2

Answer

3

Answer

4

Answer

5

Answer

6

Answer



# Types of complementary and alternative therapies

## Counselling and self-help methods

It is not uncommon for those with cancer to experience a range of emotions during their cancer journey from anger, shock, disbelief and fear to sadness, guilt and isolation. Sometimes these emotions may be hard to cope with on your own. Many counselling and self-help methods are now used together with conventional medicine in hospitals, day centres and cancer support centres.

Nowadays support and counselling can be given by clinical nurse specialists, medical social workers and counsellors at cancer centres. You can ask those involved what training they have and what professional organisation they are joined. Your doctor or nurse at the hospital will be able to give you more information as well.



### Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychotherapy

Therapies such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychotherapy are helpful for those dealing with the emotional effects of cancer. These therapies are part of conventional medicine, but some complementary therapists may also provide them. More information about CBT and psychotherapy is available in a booklet from the Irish Cancer Society called *Understanding the Emotional Effects of Cancer*. Contact the National Cancer Helpline **1800 200 700** for a free copy.



### Stress management

**Aim:** To help you recognise the signs of stress and learn how to cope with them.

**What's involved:** Usually stress management techniques are given in one-on-one sessions between you and a therapist. It can also include relaxation and breathing techniques, massage and visualisation.

Sometimes a self-study package that has a videotape, booklet and audiotape giving instruction in these techniques are supplied.

**Known benefits:** Some studies have reported that stress management can help patients cope with some side-effects of chemotherapy such as pain, fatigue, anxiety and depression.

**Known risks:** None.

### Support groups

**Aim:** Support groups can provide emotional support, information and education to those who have a particular cancer in common and have similar experiences. Some professionals may also be involved in the group, e.g. a nurse, medical social worker, psychologist, counsellor, psychotherapist or religious leader, who can offer more education about cancer or emotional issues.

**What's involved:** Groups can keep in contact in a variety of ways. Most groups meet regularly in group sizes that allow for easy conversation. Support groups can also keep in contact through printed newsletters, telephone links, internet forums, and mailing lists.

**Known benefits:** Support groups can help people feel less isolated and distressed, and improve the quality of their lives.

**Known risks:** Some people are more at ease in groups than others. Sometimes a support group might be perfect for one phase of your illness but not for another phase.

### Self-help groups

**Aim:** A self-help support group is fully organised and managed by its members, usually volunteers, who have a particular cancer in common.

**What's involved:** They can provide support, information and education to members.

**Known benefits:** Self-help groups can help people feel less isolated and distressed, and improve the quality of their lives.

**Known risks:** If the group leader (cancer survivor) does not have specific group skill training, members may feel their needs are not being met. As with support groups, self-help groups may not be suitable for everyone. Some may feel ill at ease or overwhelmed by what is being discussed in the group or by group members' behaviour.

## Spiritual healing

Sometimes people with cancer can cope better when they have spiritual support. Spirituality is concerned with a person's sense of peace and purpose, their connection to others and beliefs about the meaning of life. Sometimes this can be expressed through religion and the belief in a personal God. In times of stress spirituality can be a way to find strength and meaning.

Spiritual healing can also be known as faith healing. Faith healing is based on the belief that certain people or places are able to cure and heal. Types of healing can include therapeutic touch, prayer, a visit to a religious shrine, such as Knock, Lourdes, Jerusalem, Mecca, or simply a strong belief in a personal God.

### >>> Benefits in general

It is not known how spirituality affects cancer. There is no scientific evidence that spirituality or faith healing can cure cancer or any other disease. However, miracles, though extremely rare, can happen. Some people may link miracles or sudden cures with God, while others may link them to an unknown natural cause.



There is lots of evidence that a person's spirituality can help them cope with illness. People whose faith is deep and personal also cope better. Spiritual support can improve coping and boost your quality of life. It may help to raise your energy levels too and you may develop a feeling of personal growth. It may promote peace of mind, reduce stress, relieve pain and anxiety, and strengthen your will to live. Believing in a personal God can also make you feel you are not alone on your cancer journey. It can give hope and reduce feelings of helplessness.



### Risks in general

Sometimes people who seek help through faith healing can develop feelings of hopelessness, failure, guilt, worthlessness and depression, if no cure or improvement in their condition occurs. Be wary of those who look for large donations or charge money for faith healing sessions. It is important to note that some people may reject spiritual support during their cancer journey. Sometimes cancer can challenge a patient's beliefs or religious values, resulting in high levels of spiritual distress. Some patients may feel that cancer is a punishment by God or may suffer a loss of faith after being diagnosed.



**Energy healing or therapeutic touch** (also called laying on of hands)

**Aim:** Some people believe that 'blockages' in the normal energy flow of a person can cause illness and disease. Therapeutic touch is a technique where the hands of a therapist (healer) are used to unblock energy in the patient. The therapist does not cure or heal but acts as a channel.

**What's involved:** Physical contact is rarely involved. During the session, the person is clothed and usually lies down, but can sit or stand if they prefer. The therapist locates the area of 'blockages' by passing his/her hands, normally palms down, over the body several times. He or she balances the energy field so that healing energy is transferred to the 'blocked' area.

**Known benefits:** Some people have found that therapeutic touch can help improve anxiety, sleep problems and give a sense of well-being. There is no scientific evidence that energy is balanced or transferred in therapeutic touch, however.

**Known risks:** See risks in general above.

### Intercessory prayer group

**Aim:** Intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of oneself or others with the strong belief that a God (usually Judaeo-Christian) will heal the person(s) of cancer.

**What's involved:** It can be practised either near the patient or at a distance. When practised from afar, it can involve a single person or a group of people praying for the patient. The person who prays is acting as a mediator between God and the person with cancer, with the intention of asking God to grant the requests in their prayer. In some cases the person (or persons) knows that they are being prayed for, while sometimes they do not.

**Known benefits:** This is an area that some feel cannot be measured scientifically. Some studies have shown that intercessory prayer does have benefits, e.g. for patients after heart attacks. Other studies show that it has no benefits at all. See benefits in general above.

**Known risks:** See risks in general above.

### Prayer (in general)

**Aim:** To ask God that illness may be cured or quality of life improved.

**What's involved:** Someone can pray for themselves or for others who have cancer. This can take place in a formal or informal setting, i.e. in your home or by visiting a sacred space.

**Known benefits:** Again, this is an area that many feel cannot be measured scientifically. Praying may give a sense of hope and purpose and comfort to some people. For others, knowing that people (family, friends, etc.) are praying for them because they are much loved and respected can bring peace and solace.

**Known risks:** None.

### Meditation

See page 28.

## Mind–body methods

Mind–body methods are based on the belief that your mind is able to affect your body. They focus on techniques that can promote health and improve well-being. These therapies can include relaxation, hypnosis, visual imagery, meditation, yoga, biofeedback, tai chi, qigong, and autogenic training. Some mind–body therapies listed here are now available as complementary therapies in cancer centres.

### Aromatherapy

**Aim:** This treatment involves the use of essential oils from plants to promote health and well-being.

**What's involved:** The oils are first distilled from flowers, herbs, spices or wood and then diluted before use. Examples of oils used are chamomile, rose, lavender, geranium, frankincense and ylang ylang. The type of oil used will depend on your individual needs.

Aromatherapy oils can be gently massaged onto your skin or used in facials, body wraps, baths or vaporisers. Before being applied to the skin they are diluted in a base or carrier oil.

**Known benefits:** Some studies have shown that aromatherapy is useful in reducing stress in cancer patients and promoting a sense of relaxation and well-being.

**Known risks:** Avoid aromatherapy on skin areas exposed to radiotherapy as it makes them more sensitive. So too does exposure to the sun after aromatherapy. For this reason, attend a well-trained experienced therapist only. Using lavender and tea tree oils over a long period of time may not be suitable for women with hormone sensitive breast cancer. Certain smells may be unpleasant to someone on chemotherapy due to changes in their sense of taste and smell.

### Autogenic training

**Aim:** This therapy aims to help you use your mind to balance the systems that control your circulation, breathing, heart rate, etc. By doing so, you can train your nervous system to become relaxed.

**What's involved:** Autogenic training is based on passive concentration and is a form of self-hypnosis. It is practised in a quiet



setting, where you sit comfortably. It usually involves a series of sessions where you learn to relax your limbs, heart and breathing. This is done by focusing on bodily sensations that are associated with relaxation.

**Known benefits:** Many people find it relaxing and that it relieves stress and pain. It can improve coping abilities, self-confidence, and give a sense of personal control.

**Known risks:** If you have diabetes, heart disease or high or low blood pressure, you should consult your doctor first. Autogenic training is not recommended for those with severe mental health difficulties or epilepsy. It should be avoided in children under 5 years.

**Caution:** Attend a well-qualified therapist so that he/she can handle any strong emotions or feelings you may have at the end of the session.

### Biofeedback

**Aim:** Biofeedback is a way of teaching you how to deeply relax by using electronic feedback of your skin temperature, heart rate, breathing, and/or muscle tension, etc.

**What's involved:** Using simple machines, you learn how to affect certain body functions that are normally out of your control (such as heart rate and breathing). It usually takes place in a hospital or clinic setting.

**Known benefits:** Biofeedback can help reduce anxiety and stress related to cancer.

**Known risks:** Some people may feel dizzy or anxious afterwards. It may not be suitable for those who have low motivation or those suffering from depression or other psychiatric conditions. Avoid it if you have a pacemaker or a severe heart disorder. Talk to your doctor if you are taking insulin or blood pressure medication as the dose may need to be changed.

### Colour therapy

**Aim:** Colour therapy uses the seven colours of the spectrum in the belief that they can balance the body's energy centres and improve healing. Greens and blues, in particular, are associated with healing.

**What's involved:** Colour treatments can be applied to the body in a number of ways. Some methods include meditation with colour, solarised water (spring water in a stained glass bottle kept in direct sunlight for several hours), colour breathing (focusing on a colour as you breathe), placing of colour silks and aiming coloured light onto your body with a light box. Your own colour preferences will be used to aid healing.

**Known benefits:** Many people find this treatment relaxing and boosts their sense of well-being. There is no scientific evidence that specific colours have different healing effects.

**Known risks:** None.

### Hypnotherapy

**Aim:** Hypnosis is a deep sensation of relaxation where your subconscious mind absorbs the suggestion of the hypnotherapist in order to make a desired change in your life, and so improve personal health and well-being.

**What's involved:** Once you are in a relaxed state and your attention is focused, you concentrate on a certain feeling, idea or suggestion to aid healing or help with life goals, such as stop smoking, etc.

**Known benefits:** In some people hypnotherapy has improved nausea and vomiting linked to cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and cancer pain. But more research is needed.

**Known risks:** It is not recommended for those with severe mental health difficulties, epilepsy or very young children.

### Guided imagery / visualisation

**Aim:** By imagining scenes, pictures or experiences, it can help your body to bring about a sense of deep relaxation and calm.

**What's involved:** A therapist guides you to find pictures in your mind that are peaceful and healing to you. They can suggest imagining a peaceful place or your body having the power to fight cancer cells, etc. For the therapy to work, these sessions are done regularly and for at least 20 minutes each time.

**Known benefits:** Research has shown that guided imagery can help

patients feel more relaxed and better able to cope with their cancer treatment.

**Known risks:** Attend a well-qualified therapist so that he/she can handle any strong emotions or feelings you may have at the end of the session.

### Meditation

**Aim:** To focus the mind in the present and away from irrelevant and unnecessary thoughts, so that you enter a state of stillness and deep relaxation.

**What's involved:** It can involve focused breathing or repetition of words or phrases to calm your mind. Some forms involve emptying the mind of all thoughts, others (like Christian meditation) involve contemplating on certain topics, passages from Scripture, prayers, etc. It can be practised by anyone, at any age and of any religion.

**Known benefits:** Some studies show that meditation can help relieve chronic pain and anxiety in those with cancer. Some people find it makes them more relaxed and better able to tolerate their cancer treatment.

**Known risks:** A small number of people can develop tension, anxiety, depression and confusion, or become obsessed with meditation. For this reason, patients with severe mental health difficulties should avoid meditation. It may not be suitable for those with epilepsy.

### Relaxation exercises

**Aim:** To provide a space and atmosphere where you do certain exercises to relax your mind and body.

**What's involved:** Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique for reaching a deep state of relaxation. First you tense a muscle and hold it for a few seconds, then release that tension to bring a deep sense of relaxation. You learn how to relax your muscles when you want, just as you know how to tense them. It can also include breathing exercises, such as controlled breathing, to promote relaxation too.

**Known benefits:** Regular relaxation exercises for 20–30 minutes each day can produce a general feeling of relaxation and well-being over time. Research has shown that relaxation can decrease your heart rate,

respiration rate, blood pressure and muscle tension. It can make you calmer, improve sleeping problems and circulation. You may feel better able to respond to crises too.

**Known risks:** Some people might become anxious if they cannot relax. It should be used with caution in those with epilepsy or those who get seizures. Check with your doctor first.

## Creative arts therapies

There are many creative therapies that can improve self-esteem and promote a sense of well-being. Creative therapies can also be called expressive therapies. Some therapies are listed here but others like craftwork, sound therapy or drama can also be of help. With creative therapies, it is important that the therapist is well qualified, so that he or she can handle any strong emotions you may have due to the session.

### Art therapy

**Aim:** A form of therapy using art. It is based on the belief that engaging with art is part of the healing process. It can involve creating art, viewing it and talking about it.

**What's involved:** The art therapist may work with groups or individually, where you can explore and express your feelings. You may be given tools to paint, draw or sculpt and encouraged to engage in a creative, expressive, independent art project.

**Known benefits:** Some cancer patients find that by expressing their feelings and emotions through art it helps to release any fear, anxiety and anger they experience and improves their well-being. Others see it as a distraction to the discomfort of cancer.

**Known risks:** Attend a well-qualified therapist only, so he/she can handle any strong emotions you may have during the session.

### Creative writing

**Aim:** Creative writing is a form of self-expression that can help with the healing process.

**What's involved:** Creative writing can take place either in workshops or individually at home. A writing workshop can give you the chance to find your own voice, strength, express your creativity and share your



stories with others in a safe, supportive environment. At home, you can keep a diary or journal of your cancer journey.

**Known benefits:** Self-esteem can be improved and many report a sense of well-being and personal growth.

**Known risks:** Attend a well-qualified therapist, so he/she can handle any strong emotions you may have during the session.

### Dance therapy

**Aim:** Dance therapy is the use of movement to improve your mental and physical well-being. As a form of self-expression it focuses on the connection between the mind, body and spirit to promote health and healing.

**What's involved:** The therapist watches your movements and then designs a programme to help you meet your needs.

**Known benefits:** Some studies show that with dance therapy you can develop a positive body image; improve self-esteem; reduce stress, anxiety and depression; decrease isolation, chronic pain and body tension; increase communication skills; and encourage a sense of well-being. It is also good as a form of exercise and can release endorphins, which give a sense of well-being too.

**Known risks:** Those with cancer and chronic conditions such as arthritis and heart disease should consult their doctor before doing any type of vigorous exercise. Attend a well-qualified therapist, so he/she can handle any strong emotions you may have during the session.

### Music therapy

**Aim:** Listening to or engaging with music can help with the healing process.

**What's involved:** Music therapy sessions may involve listening, playing and singing. You can improvise tunes, write songs, discuss lyrics, perform compositions and actively participate in music production.

**Known benefits:** Some studies show that music can reduce blood pressure and calm the mind and body. Other studies have suggested that music can help reduce pain and anxiety.

**Known risks:** Attend a well-qualified therapist, so he/she can handle any strong emotions you may have during the session.



## Alternative medical systems

Alternative medical systems are healing systems and beliefs that have evolved over time in different cultures and parts of the world. Those that have developed in Eastern cultures include Traditional Chinese Medicine, Tibetan medicine and Ayurveda in India. These are some of the world's oldest holistic health and medical systems, having originated several thousands of years ago. In Western culture, the best-known examples of alternative therapies are homeopathy and naturopathy. In general, alternative systems focus on treating the whole person – mind, body and spirit.



### Alternative medicine and cancer

There is no proof that alternative medicine has cured cancer, even though it can sometimes promote feelings of well-being. Alternative medical systems on their own are not recommended as a treatment for cancer. Some alternative therapies can be used safely with conventional medicine. When this happens they are called complementary, e.g. acupuncture, meditation, reflexology and massage. Consult your doctor if you are thinking of using any alternative systems.



### Ayurveda

Ayurveda tries to integrate the body, mind and spirit to help prevent illness and promote health and well-being. Its chief aim is to restore balance in the body and mind through a harmonious relationship between three biological principles called *doshas*.

In Ayurvedic medicine a diagnosis is made by examining your body. For example, looking at your skin, nails, tongue, by listening to your breathing sounds, by taking your pulse. Questions about your symptoms, medical history, sleep, bowels, lifestyle, dreams, etc. are also asked. Ayurvedic treatments can involve a range of techniques to cleanse toxins from the body and restore balance. These can include changes in diet, lifestyle and/or habits. Some therapies used in Ayurvedic medicine include yoga (page 40), massage (page 43), herbalism (page 63) and mineral therapy (page 60).

## Homeopathy

In homeopathic medicine, there is a belief that 'like cures like'. This means that small, highly diluted substances from plants, minerals or animals are given to cure symptoms of disease. These medicines if given at higher or more concentrated doses would actually produce the symptoms of disease. With homeopathy, the doses are so small that none of the original substance may remain in the preparation. These medicines are believed to boost the body's own defence and healing systems.

Some studies show positive effects of homeopathic preparations. But it is uncertain if these beneficial effects are caused by the power of positive thinking or the placebo effect rather than the medicine given.

## Naturopathy

Naturopathy is an approach to natural healing that began in Europe. It is not a separate system but uses what is considered to be the best parts of all systems, from conventional to alternative. When treating disease, it makes use of natural forces such as air, sunlight, water, heat, massage, etc. rather than surgery or drugs. It is based on the belief that the body is able to heal itself when given the right chance. It uses therapies in lifestyle counselling, nutrition, dietary supplements, medicinal plants and exercise. It can involve other health systems such as homeopathy or Traditional Chinese Medicine.

## Tibetan medicine

Tibetan medicine is a system of healthcare practised for over 2,500 years. It is a science, art and philosophy that looks at the whole person when dealing with health. It is based on a system of understanding the body and its relationship to the environment. The key Buddhist principles of altruism, karma and ethics are part of its philosophy.

Tibetan medicine includes the use of Himalayan herbs, nutrition, cleansing, massage, lifestyle, and Tibetan astrology. See reiki (page 37) and acupuncture (page 35).

## Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

TCM is a system of healthcare that began in China thousands of years ago. It is based on the idea of balanced *qi*, or vital energy, which is believed to flow throughout the human body. It is claimed that *qi* controls a person's spiritual, emotional, mental and physical balance. This is influenced by the complementary forces of yin (female energy) and yang (male energy). In this medical system, illness is believed to occur when the flow of *qi* is disrupted and yin and yang become imbalanced.

For benefits and risks on specific Traditional Chinese Medicine therapies, see acupuncture (page 35), acupressure (below), reflexology (page 47), nutritional therapy (page 49) and herbalism (page 63).

## Energy therapies

Energy medicine involves the belief that the body has energy fields that can be used to promote healing and well-being.

There are two kinds of energy therapies. There are those that can be measured scientifically and those that cannot. In general Western medicine focuses on the first kind, such as sound therapy, light therapy, magnetic therapy, and radiation therapy. These involve the use of electromagnetic energy with specific, measurable wavelengths and frequencies to treat patients.

The second kind of energy therapy is based on the belief that human beings have a subtle form of energy. This vital energy or life force is known under different names in different cultures, for example, *qi* in traditional Chinese medicine, *ki* in the Japanese Kampo system, *prana* in Ayurvedic medicine, and *homeopathic resonance* in Western medicine. Using pressure or moving the body, therapists treat patients by placing their hands in or through these energy fields. These energies are impossible to measure with scientific instruments. So it is not easy to judge if they are effective or not as therapies.

### Acupressure

(also known as Tui Na). See page 45.

## Acupuncture

**Aim:** Acupuncture has been practised for over 2,000 years. It is based on the belief that vital energy flows throughout the body by certain pathways called meridians. The energy flow can be improved by puncturing the skin with hair-thin needles at particular locations called acupuncture points. This helps to correct and rebalance the flow of energy, which is believed to promote pain relief and healing.

**What's involved:** The acupuncture points on the body can be stimulated by a needle, pressure, electric current or laser.

**Known benefits:** Studies show that it is useful for treating nausea and vomiting after chemotherapy or surgery. It has been known to improve back pain, dental pain and migraine, and reduce blood pressure and anxiety in some people. It can improve a very dry mouth (xerostomia) caused by radiotherapy. Many other uses do not have scientific support.

**Known risks:** In general, the risks associated with acupuncture are low. Dizziness, pain, bruising and minor bleeding on the skin area are common side-effects, but do not last long. It can be very painful for a small minority. Very rarely does it cause infection and collapsed lung (pneumothorax). Avoid it if your white cell or platelet count is low. If you have lymphoedema, needles should not be placed in the affected limb. It is not suitable for those who have heart murmurs or who use pacemakers. If you have a phobia of needles it is best to avoid acupuncture, however, laser acupuncture is an option. If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor first.

### Magnetic therapy

(also known as magnetic field therapy, magnet therapy or bioenergy therapy)

**Aim:** Magnet therapy uses static magnets (like horseshoe or refrigerator magnets) on the body in order to relieve pain and treat disease. It is believed that magnets produce energy fields of different strengths that can penetrate the human body and correct imbalances and so restore health to organs and cells.

**What's involved:** Thin metal magnets can be attached to the body alone or in groups. Sometimes they are placed in bracelets and necklaces,

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or attached to adhesive patches that hold them in place. Some magnets are placed in bands or belts that can be wrapped around your wrist, elbow, knee, ankle, foot, waist, or lower back. There are also magnetic insoles, blankets and slumber pads. These magnets may be worn for just a few minutes or for weeks, depending on the condition being treated.

**Known benefits:** There are individual reports of healing with magnetic therapy, such as pain relief, but there is no scientific evidence to support these claims. It does not cure cancer.

**Known risks:** Generally harmless, but pain, nausea and dizziness have been reported. It is not recommended for those who have pacemakers or any metal device within their body, especially surgical clips. Some people develop skin rashes to the adhesives used. Some magnet products are very expensive, without having evidence that they work. Pregnant women should avoid it.

### Photodynamic therapy (PDT)

**Aim:** With PDT, light is believed to affect some functions of the body, such as hormone production, sleep and body temperature. As a result, it can improve health and well-being. In the treatment of cancer it aims to destroy cancer cells.

**What's involved:** A drug called a photosensitiser is first injected into one of your veins. Some days later, when most of the drug has left your healthy cells but remains in the cancer cells, the tumour receives light at a specific wavelength. A form of oxygen is then produced by the photosensitiser in the tumour, which kills nearby cells.

**Known benefits:** The use of light therapy to treat cancer is still unproven.

**Known risks:** Because PDT is still at the experimental stage, it should only be carried out under medical supervision and in hospitals/clinics licensed to do it. Light therapy is not recommended for patients with eye and skin sensitivity to sunlight. PDT can interact with a variety of drugs that can increase sensitivity to sunlight. It can cause burns, swelling, pain and scarring in nearby healthy tissue. Other side-effects are related to the area that is being treated, but in general do not last long. The treatment is also very expensive.

### Reflexology.

See page 47.

### Reiki

**Aim:** Reiki is based on the belief that universal energy flows through all living things and is vital for well-being. By placing their hands on or near a patient, practitioners believe reiki can balance the flow of energy through the *chakras* (where energy is centred in the body). This in turn will affect the body's natural healing system and balance the emotions.

**What's involved:** During a reiki session you lie down or sit in a comfortable position fully clothed. The practitioner or reiki master places their hands in a series of positions on or over your body using gentle strokes or touch. They channel spiritual energy to you. You can then use that energy to improve your own physical, emotional or spiritual well-being. You may feel sensations such as warmth, coolness, tingling or nothing at all.

**Known benefits:** For many people reiki can aid relaxation, relieve stress and promote a sense of calm. There is no evidence that it can cure cancer.

**Known risks:** Reiki appears to be generally safe but can cause nausea for some. Sometimes it can raise deep emotional, spiritual or psychological issues in a person's mind, which may be distressing. As with all energy therapies, those with severe mental health problems should avoid reiki.

**Note:** Those with a religious faith should know that reiki masters 'call in' spiritual beings to help in the healing session.

### Qigong

**Aim:** This is a form of traditional Chinese medicine practised for thousands of years. It is based on the belief that by correcting the flow of vital life energy (*qi*) in the body, blood circulation and the immune system can be improved.

**What's involved:** It combines movement, meditation and breathing exercises. Exercises may involve standing, sitting or lying down. Movements include stretches, slow motions, quick thrusts, jumping and bending. The various postures and movements aim to strengthen, stretch and tone the body. Breathing techniques include deep abdominal breathing, chest breathing, relaxed breathing, and holding breaths.

**Known benefits:** Some people report that it helps to reduce stress and improve their mental attitude. Though it is widely used as a complementary therapy in Chinese hospitals, qigong has not been proven to cure cancer.

**Known risks:** Those with severe mental health problems should avoid it.

### Shiatsu

**Aim:** Shiatsu is a Japanese and Chinese healing therapy practised for centuries. It has been used to help heal the body and mind through the use of finger pressure.

**What's involved:** Shiatsu involves pressure using thumbs and gentle stretches to points on the body to aid healing. These points are the same ones used in acupuncture.

**Known benefits:** Some people report that it can relieve neck and shoulder pain, backache, insomnia, menstrual problems, stress, digestive problems, arthritis and joint problems, and breathing problems. It can aid relaxation and bring a sense of well-being.

**Known risks:** None known but talk to your doctor if you are suitable for this kind of massage. If significant pressure is used on the body it may cause soreness and bruising.

**Therapeutic touch** (See page 23)

## Exercise therapies

Exercise therapy is often used as a complementary treatment when people are recovering from cancer. It is good to have some level of physical activity during and after your cancer treatment – but only a level that is safe and suitable for you. You should discuss your exercise plans with your doctor or nurse before continuing or starting any form of exercise.

Some exercise therapies are based on the belief that the body has energy fields that can be used to promote healing and well-being. There are a number of therapies that may help relieve cancer-related symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety and depression. They can focus too on developing strength, flexibility, balance and self-esteem.

### Pilates

**Aim:** Pilates is a type of physical fitness that uses the mind to control the muscles in order to keep the body balanced.

**What's involved:** With the aid of a padded mat or other equipment, the exercises involve small controlled movements to teach awareness of breath and alignment of the spine. By strengthening the deep muscles of the upper body, it can help to relieve and prevent back pain.

**Known benefits:** There are many reports of increased flexibility, strength, muscle tone, body awareness, energy, and improved mental concentration. This can lead to reduced stress and anxiety and a sense of well-being.

**Known risks:** It may not be suitable for those with bone tumours or bone conditions such as osteomalacia, osteoporosis and Paget's disease. If you suffer from back problems, consult your doctor first.

**Qigong** (See page 37)

### Tai chi

**Aim:** Tai chi is considered a gentle or soft kind of Chinese martial art that promotes health and well-being through exercise, meditation and breathing. Some call it 'moving meditation'.

**What's involved:** Tai chi is a system of slow and gentle repetitive exercises called forms. Each form has between 20 and 100 moves and can take up to 20 minutes to complete. While doing these exercises, you must focus on your breathing, which is centred in the diaphragm.

**Known benefits:** Studies have shown that it improves self-esteem, quality of life, posture, balance, muscle mass and tone, flexibility, stamina, and strength. It is also recognised as a way to reduce stress by lowering heart rate and blood pressure. Tai chi is especially suitable for older adults or for those not physically strong or healthy. Studies have shown that in older adults it improves balance, slows bone loss in women, and may help prevent falls and fractures.

**Known risks:** These are very rare but may include muscle soreness, pulled ligaments or ankle sprains.

## Yoga

**Aim:** Yoga like Pilates is a system of physical and mental exercises that try to help flexibility, stamina and strength, and reduce stress. It is believed to calm the nervous system and balance the body, mind and spirit.

**What's involved:** Yoga is a system of stretches and poses, with special attention given to breathing and alignment of the spine. It also focuses on meditation.

**Known benefits:** Studies have shown that yoga gives a sense of well-being and can improve energy levels. Some people report better flexibility, strength and concentration, a lot less anxiety and better sleep at night.

**Known risks:** Generally safe. If you suffer from back problems, consult your doctor first. Care should be taken with those who are not so supple.

## Body-based therapies

Body-based therapies can involve body contact or manipulation of bones and muscles to promote healing. These include massage, reflexology, chiropractic and osteopathy. They can involve working with one or more parts of the body. Sometimes people refer to these therapies as physical therapies or manual therapies. The word bodywork is also used to describe physical techniques used on the body.

In general, body-based therapies are safe as long as you do not use them instead of conventional therapies and attend a well-qualified therapist. It is important too that you consult your doctor before you opt for any of them. People with rheumatoid arthritis, cancer that has spread to the bone, spine injuries, osteoporosis or other bone diseases should avoid therapies that involve body manipulation as these conditions could get worse.

## Manipulative and body-based methods

Studies have been done on some manipulative and body-based therapies, but there is little evidence that they relieve cancer-related

symptoms. Chiropractic and osteopathy can be a safe form of therapy when done by a qualified and experienced practitioner.

## Aromatherapy (See page 45)

### Chiropractic

**Aim:** This therapy is based on the belief that many diseases can be cured by correcting poor alignment of the spinal column. As a result, it can help the nervous system to function better and the body to heal itself naturally.

**What's involved:** Usually you lie or sit fully clothed on a treatment couch or chair. The chiropractor places their hands on whatever part of your spine or joint that needs correcting and manipulates it in order to relieve pressure on the nerves.

**Known benefits:** With some people it can relieve back pain, neck pain and muscle spasm. Others find it useful for migraine and tension headaches.

**Known risks:** It is not recommended for cancer patients who have osteoporosis, muscle or bone tumours, bone secondaries, bleeding disorders or if taking blood thinners. In very rare cases, injuries such as stroke or severing a neck artery may result.

### Craniosacral therapy

**Aim:** This is based on the belief that the body's natural capacity for self-repair can be helped by using light touch, mainly on the head and neck.

**What's involved:** You usually lie (or sometimes sit) fully clothed on a treatment couch. The therapist places their hands lightly on your head and tunes in to what is happening in your body by 'listening' with their hands. Contact is made carefully so that you will feel at ease.

**Known benefits:** Many people report a deep sense of relaxation, an improved sense of well-being and reduced stress. There is no scientific evidence to support its use.

**Known risks:** Not suitable for any serious conditions affecting the brain or skull.

**Note:** This therapy is different to a head massage – only very gentle pressure is used.

## Osteopathy

**Aim:** Osteopathy is based on the belief that all systems in the human body work together as a unit. Restoring health can best be done by manipulating the skeleton and muscles to achieve a holistic balance.

**What's involved:** The osteopath first asks questions about your medical history and problem areas. He/she then uses gentle movements of your whole body aimed at the problem area. A wide range of techniques can be used from stretching of soft tissues and massage to rhythmic joint movements and manipulation of other parts of the body as well as the back. Advice on proper posture is also given.

**Known benefits:** Studies show that osteopathy is of benefit for musculoskeletal problems like low back pain. Tension headache may also be helped. There is no evidence that it can improve cancer-related symptoms. In the USA, a doctor of osteopathy is a fully qualified medical doctor.

**Known risks:** The risks are very rare but include spinal cord injury or stroke after manipulation of the neck. Side-effects such as discomfort or mild pain, mild headaches or tiredness usually fade within 24 hours of treatment. It should be avoided by pregnant women, those with osteoarthritis of the neck or osteoporosis of the spine, and those with bone cancer. Talk to your doctor before trying osteopathy.

**Thermo auricular ear candling** (also called ear coning or Hopi ear candling)

**Aim:** This therapy is based on the belief that by removing impurities and negative energies from the inner ear that the ear, sinuses and brain can be purified and so strengthen the nervous and immune system.

**What's involved:** A cone-shaped device is placed in the ear canal in order to remove earwax and other impurities by gentle suction and with the help of smoke or a burning wick.

**Known benefits:** Some people find this therapy very relaxing and calming. It can clear blocked sinuses and problems relating to the ear, neck and face areas. Others find the therapy ineffective.

**Note:** It cannot treat tumours of the ear.

**Known risks:** There is a high risk of burns to the ear, obstruction to the ear canal with candle wax, and a perforated eardrum. Avoid it if you have head and neck cancer.

## Massage

Massage is one of the oldest therapies that exist. Nowadays it is used more and more with conventional medicine. It is a form of touch using manipulation, rubbing and kneading of the body's muscle and soft tissue. Its aim is to relax, relieve muscle tension and reduce anxiety levels, which in turn may reduce blood pressure.

### Types of massage

There are many types of massage available nowadays. Some types are suitable for those with cancer, while others are not. It is important to consult a qualified therapist and let them know if you have been diagnosed with cancer and are receiving treatment. Check with your doctor if massage is suitable for you.

Massage can be a safe form of therapy when a qualified and experienced therapist performs it. Over the years there has been a general fear that massage therapies can increase the risk of cancer cells spreading to other parts of the body. At present there is no evidence that this happens. However, it is believed that some types of massage are not suitable for those with cancer and may be harmful, such as deep tissue massage. Massage is not recommended for cancer patients immediately after chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Massage over any known tumour site and in any area with recent surgery should be avoided.

>>> Gentle massage can be beneficial for cancer patients.

In general, gentle massage (therapeutic massage) appears to be of most benefit to cancer patients. Other popular forms of massage are Shiatsu (page 38), reflexology (page 47) and acupressure (Tui Na) (page 45). Deep tissue massage and Swedish massage are not recommended for those with cancer. There are many other types of massage not listed here such as Thai and Ki that also promote a sense of well-being and relaxation.

## What's involved in massage?

Most massage therapists first ask you questions about your medical history and any particular areas of concern or discomfort. Be open with the therapist about any treatments you have had recently. The massage itself usually takes place on a soft table covered with a sheet. You wear comfortable clothes and will be covered by a sheet, light blanket or a towel.

A typical session can last from 30 minutes to 1 hour or more. Oils can be used to prevent irritation of the skin. Massage therapists often play soothing music and use dim lighting to increase relaxation and comfort. Some massage can be done using a special chair with a face cradle, so you are fully clothed. This usually allows the massage therapist to work on your head, neck, shoulders, back, arms and hands.



### Benefits in general

Massage helps relieve muscle soreness, stiffness and spasms and also helps relaxation. Studies have shown that massage therapy helps to reduce pain and fatigue in cancer patients having chemotherapy. It can also help to reduce emotional problems related to a cancer diagnosis. For patients having a bone marrow transplant, research has found that it can bring great comfort. Massage also improves sleep and may help to reduce distress in patients with advanced cancer.



With massage, it is important to know that some symptoms can get worse before they get better. This is all part of the natural healing process.



### Risks in general

For some patients who are undergoing radiotherapy, even light touch on the treatment area may be uncomfortable. For this reason, complementary therapists do not work on the treatment area. If you have low platelet and white cell counts during chemotherapy, it is best to wait until your blood count returns to normal. Do let the therapist know if you have any conditions at the time or have been active recently. This can include leg clots, burns, skin infections, eczema, open wounds, bone fractures or advanced osteoporosis.

## Acupressure (also known as Tui Na)

**Aim:** Massage, see above.

**What's involved:** This therapy uses the thumbs and fingertips to apply pressure to the acupuncture points of the body (see acupuncture).

**Known benefits:** There are reports that it can control symptoms such as pain and discomfort or nausea.

**Known risks:** Bruising can occur if your blood platelet count is low.

## Aromatherapy

**Aim:** This treatment involves the use of essential oils from plants to promote health and well-being.

**What's involved:** The oils are first distilled from flowers, herbs, spices or wood and then diluted before use. Examples of oils used are chamomile, rose, geranium, frankincense and ylang ylang. The type of oil used will depend on your individual needs. Aromatherapy oils can be gently massaged onto your skin or used in facials, body wraps, baths or vaporisers. Before being applied to the skin they are diluted in a base or carrier oil.

**Known benefits:** Some studies have shown that aromatherapy is useful in reducing stress in cancer patients and promoting a sense of relaxation and well-being.

**Known risks:** Avoid aromatherapy on skin areas exposed to radiotherapy as it makes them more sensitive. For this reason, attend a well-trained, experienced therapist only. Certain smells may be unpleasant to someone on chemotherapy due to changes in their sense of taste and smell.

## Bowen Technique

**Aim:** This technique uses gentle pressure on soft tissues of the body in order to heal itself. Healing is believed to occur at all levels: physical, chemical, emotional, mental, energy, and so on.

**What's involved:** You usually lie on a bed or special table or sit in a chair, wearing light clothes. In a typical session the therapist uses gentle moves with fingers and thumbs through your clothing or directly onto your skin. The therapist then moves over the muscles and other soft tissue to affect your whole body.



**Known benefits:** There are reports of it improving frozen shoulder, back and neck pain.

**Known risks:** Because no deep tissue massage is involved, there are no known risks.

### Deep tissue massage (also called rolfing)

**Aim:** Massage, see above.

**What's involved:** Deep tissue massage involves working on the deeper layers of muscle tissue to try and release chronic tension or tightness. A combination of slow strokes and deep finger pressure on problem areas is used.

**Known benefits:** Some patients report that it can reduce tension and stress.

**Known risks:** Treatments can be very painful. This therapy is not suitable for those with cancer.

### Gentle massage

**Aim:** Massage, see above.

**What's involved:** This involves the manipulation of tissues with hands or special tools. Very light pressure is used on the body.

**Known benefits:** See benefits in general above.

**Known risks:** See risks in general above.

### Indian head massage

**Aim:** Massage, see above.

**What's involved:** This is a massage that focuses on the upper body, back, shoulders, neck and head. The technique uses massage strokes and pressure points to reduce stress.

**Known benefits:** People report that it can relieve tension headaches, unblock sinuses, improve circulation, reduce stress and promote a sense of well-being. See benefits in general above.

**Known risks:** See risks in general above.

### Manual lymph drainage (MLD)

**Aim:** This therapy is used in the treatment of lymphoedema, which is excess fluid in the limbs after surgery to remove lymph glands. The therapy helps to move the excess fluid away from the swollen area so that it can drain away normally.

**What's involved:** This therapy improves the body's lymphatic system (the filtering system for toxins and waste products) by using special massage techniques. It uses light pressure movements in the direction of the heart and lymph glands, so that lymph flows throughout the body. It can release blockages of lymph flow that cause oedema (swelling of the tissues).

**Known benefits:** It can relieve fluid congestion, such as swollen ankles, tired puffy eyes and swollen legs due to pregnancy. Stress, sinusitis and constipation can also be improved. It is a conventional therapy for lymphoedema following surgery for cancer of the breast, head and neck, cervix or prostate.

**Known risks:** Manual lymph drainage should only be carried out by specially trained therapists. Many hospitals now provide this therapy for cancer patients, as recommended by their doctors. If you seek the treatment elsewhere, get advice from your GP or cancer specialist first.

### Reflexology

**Aim:** Reflexology is based on the belief that specific areas of the foot (or hand) are connected to the body's internal organ system. By putting pressure on these points, the flow of vital energy throughout the body can be balanced, and so relieve symptoms such as pain, constipation and sickness. It is not used to cure cancer or diagnose medical conditions.

**What's involved:** Reflexology is a specialised form of foot massage. The reflexologist will first ask you questions about your general health. He or she will then gently examine your feet while you sit in a special chair or lie on a massage table. Using talc or oil, pressure is then applied to selected reflex points on your feet. Your feet may feel tender as they are touched or you may have a tingling sensation in areas of the body linked to the reflex points being touched. This is not

usually painful. The therapy can last from 30 minutes to 1 hour. Some reflexologists work on both the hands and the feet.

**Known benefits:** Studies show that reflexology can reduce stress and promote relaxation in cancer patients. It can reduce certain types of pain.

**Known risks:** It is not suitable for women during the first three months of pregnancy or those with a history of problems during pregnancy. Neither is it good for those who have a foot injury or clots (thrombosis), gout, phlebitis or ulcers. Inform the reflexologist if you have a pacemaker, gallstones or kidney stones, so that he/she can avoid stimulating certain points in your feet.

**Shiatsu** (See page 38)

### Swedish massage

**Aim:** Massage, see above.

**What's involved:** Swedish massage uses a system of long gliding strokes, kneading and rubbing techniques on the top layer of muscles in order to promote relaxation. Five basic strokes and variations of these are used to apply pressure to muscles.

**Known benefits:** See benefits in general above.

**Known risks:** Swedish massage is too vigorous for people with cancer. See also risks in general above.

### Therapeutic massage

See gentle massage page 46.



## Nutritional therapies and dietary supplements

It is common for people with cancer to have questions about what foods to eat during and after treatment. You may wonder what the best diet is for you. Will what you eat affect your cancer and your recovery? You may also be worried that your diet caused cancer in the first place. However, seeing that experts do not know what exactly causes cancer, you may be worrying in vain. Diet alone is never responsible for causing cancer.

### Eating well

It is important to eat well while having cancer treatments. By doing so you are unlikely to lose weight and will be better able to tolerate any side-effects of treatment. Eating well will also make you feel better and keep up your strength and energy. It will reduce the risk of infection too and help you to heal and recover quickly.

Eating well means eating a balance of the different food groups. By eating a variety of foods you will get all the nutrients you need to maintain your health during your cancer treatment. A balanced diet includes protein, carbohydrates, fat, water, vitamins and minerals.

### Special diets

It is important to know that there is no one food or special diet that has been proven to control cancer or reduce your risk of it coming back. Too much of any one food is not helpful and may even be harmful. Even though fruit and vegetables are generally good for you, in large quantities they may cause problems, especially if they make up almost all of what you eat. Special diets are likely to make you lose weight, at a time when you need energy and strength most.

After a cancer diagnosis, some people may decide to stop eating dairy products or reduce the amount of calcium in their diet. While it may be good to eat a low-fat diet in general, it is not good to cut out all sources of fat and protein in your diet.

>>> Avoid special diets because you are likely to lose weight.

## Should I change my diet?

Each person will have their own special nutrition needs. For that reason it is best to talk to your doctor or dietician about the foods you should be eating or avoiding. If your appetite is normal and you have not lost any weight, the best advice is to eat a balanced and varied diet.

It is also not wise to experiment with diets during chemotherapy or radiotherapy. During chemotherapy, you may feel fatigued, lose your appetite and energy, so you will need plenty of nutrition and calories to keep your strength up. Some cancer treatments may cause you to put on weight. It is best not to try to lose this extra weight until all your treatments are finished.



### Hints & Tips – what to eat

- Eat a balanced and varied diet.
- Eat food that you enjoy and can eat in company with family and friends.
- If you lose your appetite, take special high calorie drinks as they will help to keep your strength up and prevent you losing weight. Your doctor can give you a prescription for these drinks.
- Don't cut out certain foods because you think they are harmful. If you avoid dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese, you will exclude the main sources of calcium in your diet. If you avoid red meat, poultry and eggs, you will exclude a source of protein and iron from your diet.
- If you eat too many high-fibre foods, like fruit and vegetables, it can cause bloating and diarrhoea.
- There is no proof that organic foods are better than non-organic foods. In general organic foods are more expensive.



### Dietary supplements

Some people with cancer take large amounts of vitamins, minerals and other dietary supplements to try to boost their immune system or even destroy cancer cells. Some of these substances can be harmful. In fact, large doses of some vitamins and minerals may reduce the effect of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Let your doctor know if you are taking any dietary supplements, no matter how safe you think they are. Even though there may be adverts or claims that something has been used for years, it does not prove that it is safe or effective. You do not need a prescription to buy dietary supplements, but it is still important to be careful and use common sense.

## Cancer diets, supplements and treatments

Be careful about using special diets when receiving cancer treatments. Many of these diets are restrictive, which means that certain food items must be avoided. Restrictive diets can lead to weight loss and other nutritional deficiencies and may be harmful.

### Bristol cancer diet

**Aim:** The Bristol cancer diet focuses on providing the body with all of the nutrients it needs, while avoiding the foods which it believes prevents the body from working at its best. It is both a cancer prevention and cancer management diet.

**What's involved:** The diet is based on eating organic plant foods, in particular fresh vegetables and fruit. It recommends that people with cancer eat 7–10 portions of fruit and vegetables each day; eat wholegrains and pulses, nuts and seeds and small amounts of animal products, especially poultry and fish; reduce their intake of sugar or refined carbohydrates; avoid caffeine, alcohol, red meats and dairy products.

**Known benefits:** Some patients report feeling better on this diet.

**Known risks:** This is a low calorie diet that excludes many important sources of protein and carbohydrates, and may not be very tasty. There is no proof that organic foods are better than non-organic ones. You are likely to lose weight on this diet. Too much high-fibre foods, like fruit and vegetables, can also lead to bloating and diarrhoea. It is not recommended for those receiving cancer treatments.

### Breuss cancer diet

**Aim:** The Breuss cancer diet claims to cure cancer, leukaemia and other diseases by starving the body of protein.

**What's involved:** The diet involves fasting for 42 days during which various herbal teas and juices are taken in the belief that they will detoxify, cleanse and get rid of the cancer. These include Breuss vegetable juice (a mixture of organically grown carrot, beetroot, celery, Chinese radish and potato) and sage tea.

**Known benefits:** There are no proven benefits to this diet.

**Known risks:** This is a high-risk diet that is too simplistic, harmful and expensive.

**Caution:** Because it is a low calorie diet you will lose weight. Too much high-fibre food, like fruit and vegetables, can lead to bloating and diarrhoea. Fasting is not recommended for cancer patients and there is no enjoyment of food in this diet.

### Colonic irrigation (also known as colonic hydrotherapy)

**Aim:** This treatment claims to detoxify or cleanse the large bowel by flushing it with water and so improving constipation, diarrhoea, low energy and sluggishness.

**What's involved:** A tube is placed in your back passage (rectum) through which water may be passed alone or with added enzymes, coffee, probiotics or herbs. Treatment sessions usually last about 1 hour.

**Known benefits:** There are no known lasting benefits.

**Known risks:** This is a high-risk treatment for cancer patients. Those receiving frequent treatments may absorb too much water, leading to chemical imbalances in the blood. Nausea, vomiting, heart failure, fluid in the lungs, abnormal heart rates or coma and death are also possible. There is a risk of infection if unsterile equipment is used or if normal bowel bacteria are cleared out. Tearing of the bowel wall can occur if the therapist is not experienced.

**Caution:** Colonic irrigation is not at all recommended for patients with cancer. There are too many risks overall and in particular it should not be used for those with tumours in the colon or rectum or for conditions such as diverticulitis, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease or severe haemorrhoids or for those who have had bowel surgery.

For more on coffee enemas, see page 61.

### Cow cartilage (See also shark cartilage, page 55)

**Aim:** Cartilage is a type of elastic tissue found in humans and animals. Some patients may take this therapy to prevent and treat cancer. It is based on the belief that because cartilage does not contain blood vessels, it must contain something that can prevent blood vessels from growing around tumours. This is known as anti-angiogenesis.

**What's involved:** The cartilage is taken from various parts of the cow, often the windpipe. It can be taken by mouth usually as a pill or powder. Sometimes it can be injected into the body.

**Known benefits:** None. There is no scientific evidence for the use of cow cartilage as a cure for cancer. There is no evidence either that it boosts the immune system.

**Known risks:** The side-effects of taking cow cartilage include nausea and vomiting, altered sense of taste, fatigue, upset stomach, fever, dizziness, and swelling of the scrotum. When it is injected, swelling and redness can occur at the injection site. The therapy is expensive.

### Gerson diet

**Aim:** The Gerson diet involves a diet, coffee enemas and various supplements, including laetrile (illegal in the USA). This diet claims that by removing toxins from the body and improving chemical changes in the body (metabolism), it can heal itself and prevent cancer occurring or coming back.

**What's involved:** The diet involves taking fresh fruit and vegetable juice, no sodium or fat, large amounts of carbohydrates and potassium and low amounts of animal protein. Sometimes extra digestive enzymes can be added. Group support is also encouraged.

**Known benefits:** There are no proven benefits to this diet.

**Known risks:** This is a high-risk diet and not recommended for cancer patients.

**Caution:** The diet may cause flu-like symptoms, loss of appetite, perspiration with foul odour, weakness, dizziness, cold sores, blisters, high fever, tumour pain, intestinal cramping, diarrhoea, and vomiting. Coma and fits may occur if levels of sodium are very low.

See page 61 for more information about the risks of laetrile and coffee enemas.

## Macrobiotic diet

**Aim:** The macrobiotic diet is a combination of Eastern and Western thinking that focuses on building harmony in the body through the food eaten. It claims to cure cancer.

**What's involved:** It is a vegetarian diet containing wholegrains, fresh vegetables, beans, soups containing soy, nuts and fish occasionally.

**Known benefits:** Many of the foods in this diet such as fresh vegetables, wholegrains and fish are important elements of a healthy diet. There is no evidence that this diet cures cancer.

**Known risks:** It is a low-calorie diet, so you will lose weight. You may suffer from nutritional deficiencies, especially protein and iron, due to the limited selection of foods in this diet.

**Caution:** Some types of macrobiotic diets are high in female hormones (phytoestrogens). See page 69 for more details.

## Melatonin

**Aim:** Melatonin is believed to boost some parts of the immune system. It is also thought to prevent the growth of certain cancer cells, such as breast cancer and melanoma.

**What's involved:** Melatonin is a hormone naturally produced by the brain in response to darkness. It controls the natural cycle of sleep and wakefulness. It is also a strong antioxidant. Some scientists believe that melatonin influences hormones in the body that control reproduction, ovulation and ageing.

**Known benefits:** Studies in the laboratory on animals show that melatonin prevents the growth of certain cancer cells (including breast cancer and melanoma). But studies in humans do not show an anti-cancer effect. When used at the same time as certain chemotherapy drugs, however, melatonin may increase survival time. One study suggests that melatonin may help to reduce the side-effects commonly seen in chemotherapy, such as loss of appetite, low platelet counts, sleeplessness, fatigue and sore mouths.

**Known risks:** The side-effects of melatonin include headache, drowsiness, changed sleeping pattern, altered mental status, disorientation, fast heart rate, flushing, itching, abdominal cramps, and very low body temperature. It should not be taken by those with

depression or by children. It may interact with certain medications, e.g. blood thinners, insulin, anticonvulsants, sedatives, blood pressure medication, so it is best to check with your doctor or nurse first. Do not drive or operate machinery for 4–5 hours after taking it.

## Shark cartilage (See also cow cartilage, page 53)

**Aim:** Some patients take this therapy in order to treat and prevent cancer. It is also taken in the belief that it boosts the immune system. The use of shark cartilage against cancer is based on the belief that cartilage does not contain blood vessels, so it must contain substances that can prevent the growth of blood vessels around tumours. This action called anti-angiogenesis was seen when shark cartilage was placed directly on tumour cells in a test tube, which prevented them from growing.

**What's involved:** Cartilage is a form of elastic tissue which is taken from the heads and fins of sharks. In humans, shark cartilage can only be taken by mouth, usually as pills, powders or liquids.

**Known benefits:** There is no scientific evidence that shark cartilage can treat or prevent cancer in humans. Studies with breast cancer patients and those with colorectal cancers have shown no benefits.

**Known risks:** Some side-effects are reported but are rare. These include nausea, vomiting, upset stomach, constipation, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, and low blood sugar. It should not be taken by patients who have liver disease. The therapy is also very expensive.

## Vitamin and megavitamin therapy

Vitamins are nutrients that are needed in small amounts for the normal growth and health of the human body. Because the body does not make them, they must be taken in in food as part of a balanced diet. Multivitamin supplements can be used safely as part of healthy eating, although they may not be necessary. It is best to take them at the recommended daily allowance (RDA).

Too much of any vitamin is not safe – even for someone who is not ill. High doses of vitamins can be toxic to the body. Vitamins are also known to have strong actions in the body. For example, high doses of vitamins may affect how chemotherapy and radiotherapy work.

Vitamins are divided into two groups. There are four fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E and K) and nine water-soluble vitamins (eight B vitamins and vitamin C). The fat-soluble ones are stored in the body and can be toxic when too much are taken. In general, the water-soluble ones are not stored in the body and so cause fewer problems.

»»» Let your doctor know if you are taking any vitamin supplements.

Avoid all supplements when pregnant, unless recommended by your doctor. Discuss with your dietician the dosage of vitamins you should take.

### Megavitamin diet

**Aim:** This diet is based on the belief that large dosages of vitamins can cure disease. In particular, it is claimed that vitamin C can cure cancer. Other vitamins taken in high doses include A, B<sub>6</sub> and E.

**How vitamins work:** Vitamins C, E and beta carotene (a form of vitamin A) are antioxidants. This means they are chemicals that can prevent other chemicals called free radicals from causing cell damage. See pages 7 and 8 for more about antioxidants and free radicals.

**Known benefits:** Vitamins are necessary in the body but only at the recommended daily allowance. Research is ongoing on the benefits and risks associated with vitamins. Current studies show that there is no evidence that high doses of vitamins can cure cancer.

**Known risks:** See vitamins below for specific risks. Megavitamin diets are also expensive.

### Vitamin A (retinol)

**Aim:** Some people take large doses of vitamin A to prevent and treat cancer.

**How vitamin works:** Vitamin A is necessary for vision, growth and development in general. Also for maintaining healthy skin, hair and mucous membranes. It plays a role in the immune function and in reproduction too.

**Known benefits:** Vitamin A is essential for many bodily functions but at

recommended levels. Recent studies show that vitamin A does not help prevent cancer or its recurrence or prolong survival, especially in stomach and bowel cancers. But more studies are needed.

**Known risks:** Very high doses of vitamin A over time can cause nausea and vomiting, headaches, hair loss, sore mouth, double vision, and liver and bone damage. High doses can also affect muscular coordination and cause birth defects. Avoid supplements if pregnant or taking warfarin or other blood thinners, as it may increase the risk of bleeding. Recent studies show that taking vitamin A may increase mortality in patients with stomach and bowel cancers.

### Vitamin B Complex

**Aim:** Some alternative medical practitioners claim that deficiencies in B vitamins weaken the immune system and put the body at higher risk of cancer. They recommend high doses of B vitamins as treatments for cancer.

**How vitamin works:** B vitamins are essential nutrients for growth, development and many other bodily functions. They play a large role in the activities of enzymes (proteins) that control chemical reactions in the body.

**Known benefits:** B vitamins are essential for many bodily functions but at recommended levels. Some studies show a decrease in the risk of breast cancer with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> when taken with B<sub>6</sub> or B<sub>9</sub>. But other studies show no benefit.

**Known risks:** In general supplements containing B vitamins are thought to be safe but still should not be taken in very large doses. Some possible side-effects include gout, high blood sugars, and skin problems. Overdoses can lead to heart and liver problems.

### Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> (pyridoxine)

**Aim:** Some people take vitamin B<sub>6</sub> to prevent breast or bowel cancer. Doctors use it to treat a condition called hand-foot syndrome, which is a side-effect of some chemotherapy drugs.

**How vitamin works:** Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> helps the body break down protein, and maintain the health of red blood cells, the nervous system, and parts of the immune system.

**Known benefits:** It may be beneficial in treating hand-foot syndrome. There is some evidence that it prevents breast cancer when taken with vitamins B12 and B9. Research is ongoing.

**Known risks:** Very high doses of vitamin B6 can cause headaches, drowsiness, mild flushing, and numbness, tingling or burning in the hands and feet. Doses over 200 mg or greater per day can lead to toxicity. This can cause problems with the nerves in the hands and feet, muscular coordination, breathing difficulties, sedation, and vomiting. Avoid taking supplements if pregnant.

### Vitamin B9 (folic acid or folate)

**Aim:** Some people take folic acid because they believe it can prevent cancer, in particular cervical, colorectal and breast cancer.

**How vitamin works:** Vitamin B9 is needed for cells to make and repair DNA when creating new cells.

**Known benefits:** Folic acid has been known to prevent birth defects. There is some evidence that folic acid can prevent breast cancer when taken with vitamin B12 and B6.

**Known risks:** Folic acid is relatively safe. But at very high doses it can cause upset stomachs, sleep problems, and reduce the absorption of zinc.

**Caution:** Avoid vitamin B9 supplements if you are receiving chemotherapy, as it may interfere with some drugs, such as methotrexate. It may also affect your white cell count after chemotherapy.

### Vitamin B17 (laetrile)

Laetrile was previously called vitamin B17 but it is not now considered a vitamin. See page 61 for more on laetrile.

### Vitamin C

**Aim:** Some people use vitamin C to boost their immune system while others use it as an antioxidant to prevent and treat cancer.

**How vitamin works:** Vitamin C is a known antioxidant and is important for making many essential molecules in the body. It is needed for healthy teeth, bones, muscles and blood vessels. It also aids in the absorption of iron. The body cannot make vitamin C, so it must be taken in in food or drink.

**Known benefits:** It is essential for many bodily functions but at recommended levels. There is no evidence that vitamin C cures or prevents cancer.

**Known risks:** Vitamin C can lessen the effects of radiotherapy or chemotherapy. Too much of it can cause nausea, diarrhoea, stomach cramps, low blood sugar and low blood pressure. It can lead to kidney damage and failure. Excessive use of chewable tablets may break down tooth enamel, increasing the risk of tooth erosion and decay. It may interact with medication. Avoid supplements if you have kidney stones, kidney problems, haemochromatosis or G6PDH deficiency, or if receiving any cancer treatments. Recent studies show that taking vitamin C may increase mortality in patients with stomach and bowel cancers.

### Vitamin E (alpha-tocopherol)

**Aim:** Some people believe that vitamin E may prevent some forms of cancer.

**How vitamin works:** Vitamin E is a natural antioxidant that prevents cell damage.

**Known benefits:** A diet with adequate amounts of vitamin E is important for general health. There is no reliable evidence that it can help treat cancer. More research is needed to see if vitamin E can prevent some types of cancer, such as prostate, bladder and bowel. It may lessen the side-effects of radiotherapy and chemotherapy, such as hot flushes in women with breast cancer and peripheral neuropathy.

**Known risks:** Vitamin E is safe to take in general. Very high doses over time may lead to fatigue, dizziness, weakness, headache, blurred vision, rash and thrombophlebitis (vein inflamed due to blood clot). Avoid it if taking warfarin or other blood thinners, as large doses increase the risk of bleeding. Recent studies show that taking vitamin E may increase mortality in patients with stomach and bowel cancers.

### Coenzyme Q10 (previously called vitamin Q10)

**Aim:** Some people take coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) to prevent breast cancer coming back, while others take it to reduce the effects of some chemotherapy drugs.

**What's involved:** Coenzyme Q10 is an antioxidant that can prevent damage to DNA and cells. It is found naturally in the body and is therefore not a true vitamin. It is reported that it improves the immune system and increases resistance to certain infections and types of cancer.

**Known benefits:** Some small studies have suggested that CoQ10 may help treat cancer or reduce heart damage caused by chemotherapy, such as doxorubicin. But more research is needed in these areas.

**Known risks:** Side-effects of CoQ10 can include nausea, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, heartburn and fatigue. A high intake of CoQ10 may reduce the effect of radiotherapy in lung cancer patients. Do not take if you are taking warfarin or other blood thinners or if receiving chemotherapy. Consult your cancer specialist before taking this supplement.

## Mineral therapy

Minerals are nutrients needed by the body in small amounts to help it function properly and stay strong. Examples include iron, calcium, potassium and sodium. Some Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese Medicine remedies may contain lead, mercury or arsenic at levels that could be harmful and might interact with medication that you are taking. For that reason, it is important to tell your doctor about any herbal remedies you are taking. For those who have advanced breast cancer it may be best to avoid calcium supplements. Talk to your nurse or dietician about this.

## Selenium

**Aim:** Selenium protects cells from damage and DNA from genetic changes. Some people take it in the belief that it can prevent cancer and improve the immune system.

**What's involved:** Selenium is an antioxidant found in food. It is also necessary for the immune system to work properly.

**Known benefits:** Some studies show that selenium may reduce the risk of lung, stomach and bowel cancers, but not of prostate cancer. There is no evidence that it is an effective treatment for cancer. It can reduce the swelling that occurs in patients who have had major surgery or certain forms of radiotherapy. It is not known if selenium supplements can boost the immune system. Some studies found it does. However,

there is no proof that selenium helped these people fight infection or disease better.

**Known risks:** Selenium can affect your sleep. Very high doses can lead to muscle weakness, fatigue, hand and foot problems, dermatitis, nail and hair changes/loss, garlic breath/body odour, irritability, growth retardation and liver damage.

## Metabolic therapy

Metabolic therapy is based on the theory that improving the chemical changes in the body can make a person better able to fight disease. Metabolism refers to all the chemical changes that take place in the cells in the body so that energy and basic materials needed for living are made. By improving metabolism, it is believed that the body can heal itself and prevent cancer occurring or coming back.

## Coffee enemas

**Aim:** Coffee enemas are part of the Gerson diet. This claims that organic coffee enemas detoxify the liver, as well as cleanse the bowel. Disease is seen as a build-up of toxins in the body.

**What's involved:** Coffee enemas are used to trigger the bowel to remove toxins from the body quickly.

**Known benefits:** There are no known benefits.

**Known risks:** This is a high risk and harmful therapy. It is not recommended for cancer patients.

**Caution:** Coffee enemas can cause dehydration, infections, dangerous chemical imbalances, damage to the lining of the colon and death.

## Gerson cancer diet (See page 53)

### Laetrile

**Aim:** Some people take laetrile to prevent and treat cancer. It is sometimes called vitamin B17 but it is not a vitamin as such.

**What's involved:** Laetrile contains a chemical called amygdalin. Amygdalin is found mainly in apricot pits and contains the poison, cyanide, which is toxic to the body. It is claimed that cyanide can kill cancer cells but that it does not harm normal cells.



**Known benefits:** There are no proven benefits. Studies have proved that laetrile does not reduce the size or slow the growth of tumours. It does kill cancer cells, but affects normal cells in the same way.

**Known risks:** Laetrile is not recommended for cancer patients.

**Caution:** This product is illegal in Canada and the USA. It has been linked to several cases of cyanide poisoning in cancer patients. The side-effects of cyanide poisoning can produce a range of symptoms, including dermatitis. It has been known to cause death. Very high doses can lead to nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, low blood pressure, eyelid problems, nerve dysfunction, coma and death.

## Immuno-augmentative therapy

### Iscador (mistletoe)

**Aim:** Mistletoe is used mainly in Europe as a treatment for cancer.

**What's involved:** The leafy shoots and berries of mistletoe are used to make extracts that can be taken by mouth. Studies in the laboratory show that mistletoe has some anti-cancer activity in animals, but does not have the same effect on humans.

**Known benefits:** There is no evidence that mistletoe cures cancer. However, some studies report increased survival times.

**Known risks:** Raw mistletoe is poisonous. Eating it raw can cause vomiting, seizures, a slow heart rate, and even death. Injected mistletoe extract may cause itching or redness in the area of the injection. Less common side-effects may include other skin reactions, low-grade fevers, flu-like symptoms, and allergic reactions. Because mistletoe has not yet been proven to be a safe and effective cancer treatment, it should not be used outside of clinical trials. It should be avoided by pregnant women, those on blood pressure medication or those on any medication for heart problems, e.g. digoxin.

## Herbal medicinal products

The use of herbs to treat illness has continued for centuries and is still popular today. Herbal remedies are products found in nature. They involve the use of herbs or herb extracts to cure illness. The word **herbalism** is a form of alternative medicine that uses plants and simple extracts of plants to heal the whole body.

Just because something grows naturally does not mean it is safe. Herbal remedies are also drugs. They can affect the body in many ways – known and unknown. For this reason they are referred to as **herbal medicinal products**. These are drugs that may contain only plants, simple extracts (tinctures) or standard extracts of plants. Be careful when buying them, as sometimes they may be labelled incorrectly or mixed with substances that may be harmful.



### Note on research experiments



When herbal products are being tested, they go through stages of research. The first stage is done in the laboratory on animals. In the case of cancer, scientists try to see if herbal products can prevent the growth of tumours in animals, or what effects they have on these animals.

If the chemicals in the herb look as if they might be useful in treating cancer in animals, the next step is to give them to patients. Tests are done to find if the herb has an effect on cancer or side-effects of treatment and if they are safe to use.

With many herbs, they may show benefits when tested on animals but not on humans.

### Cat's claw (Uña de Gato)

**Aim:** Some people take this herb in the belief that it improves their immune system.

**What's involved:** Cat's claw is an extract from the bark of a tree found in Peruvian rainforests. It can be taken orally and is available in capsules, tablets, tinctures, elixirs and tea.

**Known benefits:** In laboratory experiments, cat's claw has been shown to affect immune cells in animals and stop the growth of certain cancers. There have been no studies on humans so far. There is no proof that cat's claw can treat cancer either.

**Known risks:** Cat's claw may cause diarrhoea, low blood pressure and dizziness. Bruising or bleeding of the gums may also occur.

**Caution:** Avoid it if you are on blood pressure medication, insulin, blood thinners, hormone medication, or anti-ulcer medication. Those who have had a stem cell or bone marrow transplant should avoid it also. It may interact with immunosuppressant drugs such as tacrolimus and cyclosporin. Also avoid this herb if you are pregnant or have an autoimmune disease.

## Echinacea

**Aim:** Some people take this plant extract in the belief that it boosts their immune system, in particular to prevent colds and flu's.

**What's involved:** It is not known what is involved in Echinacea. Laboratory studies show that the plant (extracts) can help fight bacteria and viruses. So it may boost parts of the immune system or not. Echinacea can be taken as extracts, tinctures, tablets, capsules or ointments.

**Known benefits:** In the laboratory Echinacea appears to reduce inflammation, relieve pain, and kill bacteria and viruses directly. There is no proof from research that these effects occur in humans. Echinacea may help to get over colds and flu's quicker but not prevent them.

**Known risks:** It can cause headache, dizziness, nausea, constipation, mild stomach pain, dermatitis. Severe allergic reactions can occur but are rare.

**Caution:** Sometimes the product may not contain the labelled amount. Avoid Echinacea if you have had a stem cell or bone marrow transplant and are taking immunosuppressants such as tacrolimus or cyclosporine. Also, if you have an autoimmune disorder such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis or collagen disorders. It is also not recommended for those who are pregnant or breastfeeding or who have multiple sclerosis, tuberculosis, HIV or AIDS. If you are taking medication, discuss it with your doctor first.

## Essiac

**Aim:** This is a herbal medicine that people claim cures cancer because of its anti-cancer activity.

**What's involved:** Essiac is a mixture of herbs such as burdock root, the bark of slippery elm tree, Turkish rhubarb and sheep sorrel.

**Known benefits:** The rhubarb ingredient of Essiac causes tumour cells in laboratory mice to die, but this does not occur when tested on humans. There is conflicting evidence that Essiac can treat cancer.

**Known risks:** Essiac may cause nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea, and contact dermatitis. Do not take it if you have kidney or liver problems. Avoid it if receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

## Evening primrose oil

**Aim:** Some people use this therapy to treat hot flushes associated with the menopause and also for breast pain.

**What's involved:** The oil extracted from the seeds of the evening primrose plant is used in herbal remedies. It contains compounds that are needed for the immune system to work.

**Known benefits:** Some small studies found it beneficial in the treatment of premenstrual breast pain, but larger studies found it of no use. There is not enough evidence to say it can help treat breast cancer.

**Known risks:** Generally safe. You may experience headache and stomach upsets with evening primrose oil. Seizures have been reported in people treated for schizophrenia who have also used primrose oil. Avoid it if pregnant or taking blood thinners (anticoagulants) or anticonvulsant medication.

## Garlic

**Aim:** Some people may take the plant garlic to prevent or treat cancer.

**What's involved:** Laboratory studies show that raw garlic has anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-parasitic, and anti-fungal activity. The garlic can be taken in tablet form.

**Known benefits:** Garlic in the diet is linked with a lower risk of stomach and colorectal cancer, but there is no scientific evidence that garlic can treat cancer in humans.

**Known risks:** Generally safe. It can cause headache, fatigue, bruising and bleeding problems, offensive odour, bad breath, stomach upset, diarrhoea, changes in the natural bacteria found in the bowels, sweating, low blood sugar, and contact dermatitis when used on the skin. Garlic can interfere with medications that prevent blood clotting (anticoagulants). As a result, it should not be taken with warfarin and certain other drugs.

### Green tea

**Aim:** Some people take green tea to prevent and treat cancer.

**What's involved:** It is not known how green tea works exactly because its many parts may interact and have an additive effect. Green tea contains chemicals called polyphenols which scientists think are responsible for its anti-cancer activity.

**Known benefits:** Laboratory tests on animals show an anti-cancer effect, but the results from studies on humans are mixed. Research is ongoing.

**Known risks:** Taking a moderate amount of green tea is harmless. Excessive green tea can cause nausea and stomach upsets. Because it makes you pass urine more often, you may become dehydrated. Limit your intake to three cups per day. The caffeine in green tea can cause insomnia, nervousness or irritability. Caffeine may also lessen the effects of certain drugs, so do not take it if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, have a peptic ulcer, are taking adenosine, atropine, codeine, warfarin or other blood thinners.

### Milk thistle

**Aim:** Some people take the plant milk thistle to prevent cancer and to improve liver damage.

**What's involved:** Milk thistle contains silymarin which is believed to have a protective effect on the liver and also antioxidant properties.

**Known benefits:** Recent laboratory studies have found that milk thistle has anti-cancer activity in colon and prostate cancer cells, but it is not known if this effect occurs in humans.

**Known risks:** Few ill-effects have been reported so far, except for rare occurrences of sweating, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal

pain, weakness, and collapse after taking milk thistle. In one study, joint aches, headaches and hives were infrequently reported. Patients taking regular medications should discuss this therapy with their doctor or nurse before taking it. Not recommended for women with hormone-sensitive conditions like breast or ovarian cancer.

### Selenium (See page 60)

### St John's Wort

**Aim:** St John's Wort is a plant that acts as an antidepressant in the treatment of mild depression and anxiety.

**What's involved:** The active ingredient in St John's Wort is unknown. Some studies suggest a compound called hypericin, while others suggest it is hyperforin. These may interact with chemicals in the brain that can prevent depression and anxiety. Also, substances in St John's Wort called bioflavonoids might sedate the nervous system and bring pain relief.

**Known benefits:** It can help to relieve mild depression, but is not effective with more severe forms.

**Known risks:** It can cause stomach and bowel upsets, allergic reactions, fatigue, dizziness, confusion, dry mouth and photosensitivity. You should not take it with other antidepressants.

**Caution:** Do not use St John's Wort if you are receiving chemotherapy. It can interfere with the action of many different drugs. Check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure that other medications you are taking do not interact with St John's Wort.

**Note:** This herbal antidepressant is 'prescription only' in Ireland, but no licensed products are currently available. This means that you will need a prescription on a 'named patient' basis from a doctor to get it.

### Other herbal or plant products

There are other products that may cause problems for you, if you have other medical conditions and are also receiving treatment for cancer.

**Feverfew, ginger or ginkgo biloba** when combined with warfarin or aspirin may cause excessive bleeding. **Kelp** may interact with chemicals containing iodine that are used in some X-ray tests, such as bone

scanning. **Liquorice** is found in many traditional Chinese herbal mixes and formulas, but it can increase blood levels of steroids and prolong their effects. Though it can improve fatigue in those receiving chemotherapy, **Ginseng** can also increase blood pressure, which can cause problems if you have a low platelet count. Some people take **kava** to relieve anxiety, but it can cause serious liver problems.

## Flower remedies

Flower remedies were developed by Dr Edward Bach in the 1900s and are highly diluted extracts from the flowers of wild plants. These extracts are known as tinctures and are taken by mouth. The flower remedies work on the belief that our emotions can affect our health. Therapists believe that flower remedies can help lift your mood and so help you cope with feelings such as stress, anxiety, fear and panic. There are 38 different flower remedies, and each is said to help cope with a specific mood or emotion.

There is no evidence that using flower remedies will help to control, prevent or cure cancer or boost your immune system. The remedies appear to be safe if you use them as instructed. If you are trying to avoid alcohol, be aware that the remedies often contain very small amounts of brandy. Even though the remedies are claimed to be harmless, you should talk to your doctor before trying them.

## Bach Flower Remedies

**Aim:** Bach flower remedies are based on the belief that your emotions affect your physical condition. They are believed to improve your mood and so benefit health.

**What's involved:** Bach flower remedies are extracted from the flowers of wild plants, bushes and trees, and mixed with spring water and alcohol. Usually, 2 to 4 drops of the preparation are placed directly under the tongue several times a day or mixed with water.

**Known benefits:** Many patients find that Bach flower remedies do improve their spirits and ease stress. There is no scientific evidence to prove that these remedies can cure illness or relieve emotional problems.

**Known risks:** Persons taking Antabuse as part of treatment for alcohol abuse should consult their doctor before using any of the Bach flower essences.

## Passion flower

**Aim:** People take this plant in the belief that it will relieve sleep problems or anxiety. Centuries ago, the plant was taken by the Aztecs in South America as a sedative.

**What's involved:** Passion flower works as a mild sedative or tranquiliser.

**Known benefits:** There are many personal stories of passion flower improving anxiety and insomnia. There is some scientific evidence that passion flower can reduce anxiety and insomnia, but more studies are needed.

**Known risks:** Side-effects can include stomach upsets, diarrhoea, allergic reactions and rashes. Avoid it if you are pregnant or breastfeeding or taking other sedatives prescribed by your doctor. Because it is a sedative, care should be taken when driving or operating machinery. Avoid taking alcohol with it. If you are taking medication, discuss it with your doctor.

## Rescue® Remedy

**Aim:** Some people take Rescue Remedy to deal with stressful situations and stay calm. This is a ready-mixed Bach remedy.

**What's involved:** Rescue Remedy contains five flower essences. They are extracted and mixed with spring water and alcohol. Usually, 2 to 4 drops of the preparation are placed directly under the tongue several times a day or mixed with water.

**Known benefits:** Some patients find that it boosts their sense of well-being. Scientific studies found no difference between Rescue Remedy and a placebo containing no active ingredients.

**Known risks:** Persons taking Antabuse as part of treatment for alcohol abuse should talk to their doctor before taking Rescue Remedy.

## Phytoestrogens

Phytoestrogens are chemicals similar to the hormone oestrogen and are found in plants. They may also be antioxidants and so play a part in preventing cancer. There are two main types called isoflavones and lignanes. Isoflavones are mainly found in legumes, which are

vegetables produced in a pod, such as peas, beans and soybeans. Lignanes are found in linseed. Phytoestrogens can be found in plants such as alfalfa, black cohosh, flaxseed (linseed), red clover, saw palmetto, and soy.

These vegetables and herbs are often promoted as a 'natural alternative' to hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Women who have cancer of the womb or breast, especially those that have tumours sensitive to oestrogen or who are taking tamoxifen, should not take phytoestrogens. For that reason, it is important to talk to your doctor, nurse or dietician before taking any herbs or starting any special diets, e.g. macrobiotic ones.

### Alfalfa

**Aim:** Some take this herb in the belief that it will control high blood sugars and decrease high cholesterol.

**What's involved:** Alfalfa contains fibre and substances that are believed to bind with cholesterol in the body. Alfalfa plants also contain phytoestrogens that act like some human hormones.

**Known benefits:** Alfalfa tablets may help to lower cholesterol in the blood but more evidence is needed to understand how this happens.

**Known risks:** Alfalfa may cause minor stomach upsets or discomfort. Because of its hormonal effects, it should be avoided during pregnancy and breastfeeding and if you are taking contraceptives or hormonal therapy. Those with diabetes, lupus, gout or those taking water pills should also avoid it. Excessive use may reduce your red and white blood cells.

**Caution:** Those with hormone-sensitive cancers, such as breast cancer or prostate cancer, should avoid this herb. In laboratory studies, alfalfa increased the growth of oestrogen-sensitive breast tumours better than oestrogen found naturally in the body.

### Black cohosh

**Aim:** Some women use the roots of the plant black cohosh to treat symptoms of the menopause, and as an alternative to HRT. Black cohosh is part of the buttercup family.

**What's involved:** It is not known how black cohosh works. Some

scientists believe it acts in the same way as the female hormone oestrogen, but there is no definite evidence as yet. It can be taken by mouth as a pill, liquid extract or dried root.

**Known benefits:** Several studies support the use of black cohosh in the treatment of menopausal symptoms, but it is still unknown if it is safer than conventional HRT.

**Known risks:** One side-effect of black cohosh is stomach upsets. There is also a risk of liver damage. Avoid it if on chemotherapy. It should not be taken by patients who have, or were treated for, an oestrogen-sensitive cancer, e.g. breast cancer. It should also be avoided by those taking contraceptives or blood thinners or those who are allergic to aspirin.

**Caution:** Patients should stop taking black cohosh root and consult their doctor immediately if they develop signs and symptoms of liver damage – tiredness, loss of appetite, yellowing of the skin and eyes, dark urine, and severe stomach pain with nausea or vomiting.

### Red clover

**Aim:** Red clover is a plant that contains phytoestrogens. Some women use it to treat symptoms of the menopause, as an alternative to HRT.

**What's involved:** Red clover contains isoflavones, which are chemicals that have been found to have an oestrogen effect in laboratory experiments. However, when used in humans, the effects of these isoflavones are less clear.

**Known benefits:** Red clover has been linked to improving the elasticity of the major arteries, which may decrease the risk of high blood pressure. However, the long-term effects of red clover on the risk of heart disease are not known. At present, there is no evidence that red clover relieves symptoms of the menopause, other than improving hot flushes. Some studies show that it has an oestrogen effect, while others show that it has no effect at all. There is no evidence that it can lower blood levels of cholesterol or fats (triglycerides) either.

**Known risks:** Red clover can increase the risk of bleeding, so avoid it if you are on warfarin or other blood thinners.

**Caution:** Those with hormone-sensitive cancers or conditions, such as breast or ovarian cancer or endometriosis, should avoid this herb.

## Flaxseed (linseed)

**Aim:** Some people use the plant flaxseed (also known as linseed) to treat symptoms of the menopause or for coughs, colds, constipation or urinary infections. Others take it to prevent or reduce heart disease and cancer.

**What's involved:** Flaxseed contains a high number of phytoestrogens. For that reason it can affect symptoms of the menopause. In the laboratory it has also been shown to affect the growth of breast and prostate cancers. Flaxseed also contains a chemical (alpha-linolenic acid) that protects against heart disease and kidney damage.

**Known benefits:** Flaxseed may be of benefit in the treatment of menopausal symptoms. There is no conclusive evidence that it reduces high cholesterol. Some studies on cancer prevention in animals are positive, but further studies in humans are needed.

**Known risks:** Possible side-effects include allergic reactions, increased bowel movement, constipation and flatulence. This herb should be avoided if you are having X-ray tests as it may interfere with the test results.

**Caution:** Men and women with hormone-sensitive cancers should consult their doctor before taking this plant.

## Soy

**Aim:** When taken as part of a healthy diet, soy protein may help lower high cholesterol levels and prevent bone loss in women after the menopause. Others take it to prevent cancer.

**What's involved:** Soy contains large amounts of chemicals known as isoflavones (phytoestrogens). In younger women, the effects of soy are weak because oestrogen is not scarce in the body at that age. At menopause, it is believed that this effect increases due to less oestrogen in the body. In laboratory studies, soy isoflavones do not prevent tumours altogether, but slow down the growth of some types of cancer cells, including breast and prostate cancers.

**Known benefits:** Some research has shown that soy protein (not soy pills) decreases levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and may increase HDL (good) cholesterol. There is still debate on whether soy can help

relieve symptoms of the menopause or not. Some research has shown that women who have a high soy intake have a lower risk of breast cancer and cancer of the womb. Other studies show that phytoestrogens from soy can also reduce the risk of breast and lung cancer. But it is not known for certain if soy worsens breast cancers that are hormone sensitive.

**Known risks:** Side-effects include flatulence and allergic reactions.

**Caution:** Soy should not be taken if you have hormone-sensitive breast cancer and are taking tamoxifen. Talk to your doctor and nurse about it.

## Saw palmetto

**Aim:** Some men may take saw palmetto to help relieve symptoms of an enlarged prostate, known as benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH). Others may take it to prevent or treat prostate cancer.

**What's involved:** Research in the laboratory shows that saw palmetto has an effect on the male hormones, testosterone and dihydrotestosterone. It is believed that it does not decrease the levels of these hormones in the blood, but causes body tissues like the prostate to take in lower levels of the hormones.

**Known benefits:** Studies in general have shown that saw palmetto can improve urinary symptoms in men with BPH. There is no proof that it can prevent or treat prostate cancer.

**Known risks:** Possible side-effects include nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. There is also an increased risk of bruising and bleeding, so avoid it if you are taking warfarin or other blood thinners. The quality of saw palmetto can vary between preparations too – some may contain no active ingredients.

**Caution:** Avoid saw palmetto if you are having hormone therapy.



## Support resources

### Where can I get trusted sources of information?

There is a lot of information on complementary and alternative therapies available today, so it is important to go to sources that you can trust. A comprehensive list of various organisations is given at the back of this booklet.

#### Advertised products

Be careful of products advertised by people or companies that:

- Make claims that they have a 'cure'.
- Do not give specific information about how well their product works.
- Make claims only about positive results that have few side-effects.
- Say they have done research to prove the product works, but provide no proof or copies of these studies.

Finally, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

#### Internet websites

Patients and their families have been able to find answers to many of their questions about complementary or alternative medicine on the internet. Many websites are good resources for such information. However, some may be unreliable or misleading.

#### Questions to ask about a website

- Who runs and pays for the website?
- Does it list any credentials?
- Does it represent an organisation that is well known and respected?
- What is the purpose of the website, and who is it for?
- Is the website selling or promoting something?
- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information based on facts or only on someone's feelings or opinions?
- How is the information chosen? Is there a review board or is the content reviewed by experts?
- How current is the information?
- Does the website tell when it was last updated?
- How does the website choose which other sites to link you to?

## Useful organisations

### Irish Cancer Society

43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4  
National Cancer Helpline  
1800 200 700  
Action Breast Cancer 1800 30 90 40  
Prostate Cancer Information Service  
1800 380 380  
Email: [helpline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:helpline@irishcancer.ie)  
Website: [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

### The Carer's Association

Priors Orchard  
John's Quay  
Kilkenny  
Tel: 056 772 1424  
Freefone 1800 024 07 24  
Email: [ceo@carersireland.com](mailto:ceo@carersireland.com)  
Website: [www.carersireland.com](http://www.carersireland.com)

### Citizens Information Board (formerly Comhairle)

Citizen Information Service: 1890 777 121  
Tel: 01 605 9000  
Email: [information@ciboard.ie](mailto:information@ciboard.ie)  
Website: [www.citizensinformationboard.ie](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie)

### Dept of Social and Family Affairs –

Information Service  
Oisín House  
212–213 Pearse Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 1850 662 244  
Email: [info@welfare.ie](mailto:info@welfare.ie)  
Website: [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

### Food Safety Authority of Ireland

Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street  
Dublin 1  
Tel: 1 817 1300/1800 33 66 77  
Email: [info@fsai.ie](mailto:info@fsai.ie)  
Website: [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie)

### healthhub.ie

[Irish health resource website]  
Tel: 01 410 0669  
Fax: 01 410 0693  
Email: [info@healthhub.ie](mailto:info@healthhub.ie)

### Irish Medicines Board

Earlsfort Centre  
Earlsfort Terrace  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 676 4971  
Fax: 01 676 7836  
Email: [imb@imb.ie](mailto:imb@imb.ie)  
Website: [www.imb.ie](http://www.imb.ie)

### National Consumer Agency

4 Harcourt Road  
Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 402 5555 / 1890 432 432  
Fax: 01 402 5501  
Email: [odca@entemp.ie](mailto:odca@entemp.ie)  
Website: [www.odca.ie](http://www.odca.ie)

## Institutes and associations

Names and contact details of organisations are correct at time of printing but may be subject to change.

### Complementary therapies

#### Association of Registered Complementary Health Therapists of Ireland (ARCHTI)

Ballydaniel  
Camolin  
Enniscorthy  
Co Wexford  
Tel: 053 9383 734  
Email: [info@irishtherapists.ie](mailto:info@irishtherapists.ie)  
Website: [www.complementarytherapists.org/](http://www.complementarytherapists.org/)

### The Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations (FICTA)

c/o Lucy Mullee  
61 Balally Park  
Dublin 16  
Tel: 087 618 7218  
Email: [ficta-chair@ficta.com](mailto:ficta-chair@ficta.com)  
Website: [www.ficta.com](http://www.ficta.com)

### Counselling & mind-body methods

#### Institute of Clinical Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy (IChP)

Therapy House  
6 Tuckey Street  
Cork  
Tel: 021 427 3575  
Fax: 021 427 5785  
Email: [hypnosis@iol.ie](mailto:hypnosis@iol.ie)  
Website: [www.hypnosiseire.com](http://www.hypnosiseire.com)

#### Irish Council for Psychotherapy

73 Quinn's Road  
Shankill  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 272 2105  
Fax: 01 272 2111  
Email: [info@icpty.ie](mailto:info@icpty.ie)  
Website: [www.psychotherapy-ireland.com](http://www.psychotherapy-ireland.com)

#### Irish Institute of Counselling & Hypnotherapy

118 Stillorgan Road  
Dublin 4  
Tel: 01 260 0118  
Email: [iich@therapy.iol.ie](mailto:iich@therapy.iol.ie)  
Website: [www.iich.ie](http://www.iich.ie)

### Body-based methods

#### Accredited Bowen Therapists of Ireland

c/o Pauline Flanagan  
26 Cherryville  
Enniskillen  
Co Fermanagh BT74 4FY  
Tel: 048 6632 9599  
Website: [www.bowenireland.com](http://www.bowenireland.com)

### Association of Neuromuscular Therapists (ANMT)

16a St Joseph's Parade  
Dorset Street  
Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 830 7063  
Fax: 01 830 8757  
Email: [info@anmt.ie](mailto:info@anmt.ie)  
Website: [www.anmt.ie](http://www.anmt.ie)

### Chiropractic Association of Ireland

21 Penrose Wharf  
Cork  
Tel: 021 455 3273  
Website: [www.chiropractic.ie/](http://www.chiropractic.ie/)

### Institute of Physical Therapy and Applied Science (IPTAS)

18 Priory Hall  
Stillorgan  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 283 5566  
Email: [info@iptas.com](mailto:info@iptas.com)  
Website: [www.iptas.com](http://www.iptas.com)

### Irish Association for CranioSacral Therapy (IACST)

Heath Wilson Clinic  
Blessed Well Road  
Spanish Point  
Co Clare  
Tel: 086 2111 146  
Email: [heath.wilson@heathwilsonclinic.com](mailto:heath.wilson@heathwilsonclinic.com)

### Irish Association of Physical Therapists

PO Box 9434,  
Ballsbridge  
Dublin 4  
Tel: 086 218 5806  
Email: [info@iapt.ie](mailto:info@iapt.ie)  
Website: [www.iapt.ie](http://www.iapt.ie)



**Irish Massage Therapists Association (IMTA)**

PO Box 10546  
Dublin 8  
Tel: 086 377 3801  
Email: [info@massageireland.org](mailto:info@massageireland.org)  
Website: [www.massageireland.org](http://www.massageireland.org)

**Irish Osteopathic Association**

c/o Karl Prendergast (Secretary)  
6 Monksfield  
Salthill  
Galway  
Tel: 091 589417  
Email: [karlp@iolfree.ie](mailto:karlp@iolfree.ie)  
Website: [www.osteopathy.ie](http://www.osteopathy.ie)

**Irish Reflexologists' Institute (IRI)**

Fitzwilliam Business Centre  
Singleton House  
Laurence Street  
Drogheda  
Tel: 041 980 6904  
Email: [administrator@reflexology.ie](mailto:administrator@reflexology.ie)  
Website: [www.reflexology.ie](http://www.reflexology.ie)

**Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists**

Royal College of Surgeons Ireland  
St Stephen's Green  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 402 2148 (24-hour voicemail)  
Fax: 01 402 2160  
Email: [info@iscp.ie](mailto:info@iscp.ie)  
Website: [www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie)

**Manual Lymph Drainage Ireland**

c/o Elaine Grehan  
1 Cochóg  
Oranmore  
Co Galway  
Tel: 086 3339 668  
Email: [contact@mldireland.com](mailto:contact@mldireland.com)  
Website: [www.mldireland.com](http://www.mldireland.com)

**National Register of Reflexologists (Ireland)**

Terryland House  
Headford Road  
Galway  
Tel: 091 547 688  
Email: [info@nationalreflexology.ie](mailto:info@nationalreflexology.ie)  
Website: [www.nationalreflexology.ie](http://www.nationalreflexology.ie)

**Natural Healing Institute of Ireland [ & the Natural Healing Centre ]**

Thompson House  
MacCurtain Street  
Cork  
Tel: 021 450 1600  
Email: [nhii@02.ie](mailto:nhii@02.ie)  
Website: [www.nhc.ie](http://www.nhc.ie)

**Register of Qualified Aromatherapists Ireland**

c/o Natural Options  
85 Glasnevin Avenue  
Dublin  
Tel: 087 243 6496

**Eastern medicine****Acupuncture Council of Ireland**

c/o Catherine Woods (Administrator)  
TCMCI  
Station House, Shankill  
Dublin 18  
Locall 1850 300 600  
Tel: 01 239 3267  
Catherine Woods: 061 383 748  
Email: [info@tcmci.ie](mailto:info@tcmci.ie)  
Website: [www.acupuncturefoundation.org](http://www.acupuncturefoundation.org)

**Ayurvedic Medicine**

c/o Mary Daly  
Maharishi Ayurveda Health Centre  
14 Ontario Terrace  
Rathmines  
Dublin 6  
Tel: 01 496 0762  
Email: [dublinm@gofree.indigo.ie](mailto:dublinm@gofree.indigo.ie)

**Professional Register of Traditional Chinese Medicine (PRTCM)**

PRTCM Secretary  
ICTCM House  
Merchants Road  
Dublin 3  
Tel: 01 8559 000  
Email: [college@chinesemedicine.ie](mailto:college@chinesemedicine.ie)  
Website: [www.chinesemedicine.ie](http://www.chinesemedicine.ie)

**Tara Institute of Tibetan Medicine**

42 Lesson Street Lower  
Dublin 2  
Email: [bsweeney@eircom.net](mailto:bsweeney@eircom.net)

**Holistic medicine****Irish Association of Holistic Medicine**

66 Eccles Street  
Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 830 4211  
Email: [info@holistic-psychotherapy.org](mailto:info@holistic-psychotherapy.org)  
Website: [www.holistic-psychotherapy.org](http://www.holistic-psychotherapy.org)

**Homeopathy****Irish Society of Homeopaths**

6 Suffolk Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 675 5177  
Email: [info@irishhomeopathy.ie](mailto:info@irishhomeopathy.ie)  
Website: [www.irishhomeopathy.ie](http://www.irishhomeopathy.ie)

**Naturopathy****Association of Naturopathic Practitioners (ANP) Ireland**

Mary Bruen (PRO)  
Tel: 01 830 4285  
Email: [marybruen@eircom.net](mailto:marybruen@eircom.net)  
Website: [www.anpireland.com](http://www.anpireland.com)

**Energy therapies****Kinesiology Association of Ireland**

'Lumiere'  
Naul Road  
Garristown  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 835 4830

Email: [kci@iol.ie](mailto:kci@iol.ie)  
Website: [www.kai.ie](http://www.kai.ie)

**Professional Register of Kinesiology College of Ireland**

c/o Geraldine Hunter  
1 Rockgrove  
Midleton  
Co Cork  
Tel: 021 463 3421  
Email: [kci@iol.ie](mailto:kci@iol.ie)  
Website: [www.kinesiologyireland.com](http://www.kinesiologyireland.com)

**Association of Systematic Kinesiology in Ireland (ASK Ireland)**

Roe Kilmeena  
Westport  
Co Mayo  
Tel: 087 271 9863  
Email: [info@kinesiology.ie](mailto:info@kinesiology.ie)  
Website: [www.kinesiology.ie](http://www.kinesiology.ie)

**Reiki Federation of Ireland**

c/o Mary Tuohy  
An Droichead Ur  
11 Ranelagh Village  
Dublin 6  
Tel: 087 220 6382  
Email: [info@reikifederationireland.com](mailto:info@reikifederationireland.com)  
Website: [www.reikifederationireland.com](http://www.reikifederationireland.com)

**Shiatsu Society of Ireland**

PO Box 7683, Malahide  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 845 3647  
Email: [pjohanlon@eircom.net](mailto:pjohanlon@eircom.net)  
Website: [www.shiatusocietyireland.com](http://www.shiatusocietyireland.com)

**Irish Martial Arts Commission (IMAC)**

1 Church Lane  
Kevin Street  
Dublin 8  
Tel: 01 476 2008  
Fax: 01 476 2008  
Email: [brd@iol.ie](mailto:brd@iol.ie)  
Website: [www.martialarts.ie](http://www.martialarts.ie)

**Yoga Federation of Ireland**

20 Auburn Drive  
Killiney  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 235 2120  
Email: yfi@eircom.net  
Website: www.yfi.ie

**Nutritional therapies****Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute (INDI)**

Ashgrove House  
Kill Avenue  
Dún Laoghaire  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 280 4839  
Fax: 01 280 4299  
Email: info@indi.ie  
Website: www.indi.ie

**Herbal medicinal products****Irish Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine (IRCHM)**

5 Lower Mount Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 454 2140  
Email: chairperson@irchm.com  
Website: www.irchm.com

**National Herbal Council (Ireland)**

5 Lower Mount Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 611 4819  
Email: info@nationalherbalcouncil.com  
Website: www.nationalherbalcouncil.com

**Health insurers****Hibernian Health** (formerly VIVAS Health)

Mountain View  
Central Park  
Leopardstown  
Dublin 18  
Tel: 1850 717 717  
Email: info@hibernianhealthinsurance.ie  
Websites: www.vivashealth.ie  
www.hibernian.ie/online/health

**Quinn Healthcare** (formerly BUPA)

Mill Island, Fermoy  
Co Cork  
Locall: 1890 700 890  
Fax: 025 42122  
Email: info@quinn-healthcare.com  
Website: www.quinn-healthcare.com

**Voluntary Health Insurance (VHI)**

VHI House  
Lower Abbey Street  
Dublin 1  
Tel: 01 872 4499  
Email: info@vhi.ie  
Website: www.vhi.ie

**Support groups & support centres****Bowel Cancer Support Group**

c/o Irish Cancer Society  
43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4  
National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700  
Email: support@irishcancer.ie  
Website: www.cancer.ie

**CanTeen Ireland**

Young Peoples' Cancer Support Group  
c/o Carmichael Centre  
Brunswick Street  
Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 872 2012  
Email: canteen@oceanfree.net

**Lymphoma Support Ireland (LSI)**

c/o Irish Cancer Society  
43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4  
National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700  
Email: support@irishcancer.ie  
Website: www.lymphoma.ie

**Men Against Cancer (MAC)**

c/o Irish Cancer Society  
43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4  
National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700  
Email: support@irishcancer.ie  
Website: www.cancer.ie

**Reach to Recovery**

c/o Irish Cancer Society  
43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4  
Action Breast Cancer Helpline  
1800 30 90 40  
Email: support@irishcancer.ie  
Website: www.cancer.ie

**ARC Cancer Support Centre**

ARC House  
65 Eccles Street  
Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 830 7333  
Email: info@arccancersupport.ie  
Website: www.arccancersupport.ie

**Bray Cancer Support & Information Centre**

36B Main Street  
Bray  
Co Wicklow  
Tel: 01 286 6966  
Email: bcsc@iol.ie  
Website: www.braycancersupport.ie

**Cancer Information & Support Centre**

Mid-Western Regional Hospital  
Dooradoyle  
Co Limerick  
Tel: 061 482615

**Cork ARC Cancer Support House**

Cliffdale  
5 O'Donovan Rossa Road  
Cork  
Tel: 021 427 6688

**'Solas' – Donegal Cancer Support Centre**

St Joseph's Avenue  
Donegal Town  
Tel: 074 974 0837  
Email: solacedonegal@eircom.net

**The Gary Kelly Support Centre**

Georges Street  
Drogheda  
Co Louth  
Tel: 041 980 5100  
Fax: 041 980 5101  
Email: info@garykellycentre.org  
Website: www.garykellycentre.org

**Greystones Cancer Support**

La Touche Place  
Greystones  
Co Wicklow  
Tel: 01 287 1601

**HOPE**

Enniscorthy Cancer Support & Information Centre  
22 Upper Weafer Street  
Enniscorthy  
Co Wexford  
Tel: 053 9238 555

**The LARCC Retreat Centre**

Ballinalack  
Mullingar  
Co Westmeath  
Tel: 044 71971  
Email: info@larcc.ie  
Website: www.larcc.ie

**Lios Aoibhinn Cancer Support Centre**

85 Nutley Lane  
Donnybrook  
Dublin 4  
Tel: 01 260 5756

**Mayo Cancer Support Association**

Rock Rose House, 32 St Patrick's Avenue  
Castlebar  
Co Mayo  
Tel: 094 903 8407

**Sligo Cancer Support Centre**

2A Wine Street  
Sligo  
Tel: 071 9670 399  
Email: scsg@tinet.ie

**South East Cancer Foundation**

7 Sealy Close  
Earlscourt  
Waterford  
Tel: 051 876 629  
Fax: 051 876 718  
Email: infosecf@eircom.net

**The Tuam Cancer Care Centre**

30 Temple Jarlath Court  
High Street  
Tuam  
Co Galway  
Tel: 093 28522  
Email: info@tuamcancercare.ie  
Website: www.tuamcancercare.ie

**Turning Point – Positive Health Centre**

23 Crofton Road  
Dún Laoghaire  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 280 7888  
Email: turningpoint@eircom.net  
Website: www.turningpoint.ie

**Useful contacts outside Republic of Ireland****Action Cancer**

Action Cancer House  
1 Marlborough Park  
Belfast BT9 6XS  
Tel: 028 9080 3344  
Email: info@actioncancer.org  
Website: www.actioncancer.org

**American Cancer Society**

1599 Clifton Road NE  
Atlanta, GA 30329-4251  
Website: www.cancer.org

**Bristol Cancer Help Centre (UK)**

Grove House  
Cornwallis Grove  
Bristol BS8 4PG  
Tel: 0044 117 980 9500  
Fax: 0044 117 923 9184  
Email: info@bristolcancerhelp.org  
Website: www.bristolcancerhelp.org

**Cancerbackup (UK)**

Tel: 0044 207 696 9003  
Helpline: 0044 207 7392280  
Website: www.cancerbackup.org.uk

**Cancer Nutrition Info, LL**

Website: www.cancernutritioninfo.com

**Centre for Complementary Health Studies, University of Exeter (UK)**

Website:  
www.services.ex.ac.uk/eml/special.html#ComplementaryandAlternativeHealth

**Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (US)**

Website: www.mskcc.org

**National Cancer Institute (US)**

Website: www.nci.nih.gov

**National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)****National Health Institutes (US)**

Email: info@nccam.nih.gov  
Website: http://nccam.nih.gov/

**The Ulster Cancer Foundation**

40–42 Eglantine Avenue  
Belfast BT9 6DX  
Tel: 048 906 63281  
Website: www.ulstercancer.co.uk

**The Wellness Community – National Cancer Support, Education and Hope (US)**

Website: www.thewellnesscommunity.org

## Helpful books

**Free booklets available from the Irish Cancer Society**

- *Coping with Fatigue*
- *Understanding the Emotional Effects of Cancer*
- *Lost for Words: How to Talk to Someone with Cancer*
- *Who Can Ever Understand? Taking about Your Cancer*
- *Talking to Children about Cancer. A Guide for Parents*
- *A Time to Care: Caring for Someone Seriously Ill at Home*

***Challenging Cancer: Fighting Back, Taking Control, Finding Options***

(2nd edn)  
Dr Maurice Slevin & Nira Kfir  
Class Publishing, 2002  
ISBN 1-85959-068-3

***The Desktop Guide to Complementary and Alternative Medicine: An Evidence-based Approach*** (2nd edn)

Prof Edzard Ernst, Max H. Pittler & Barbara Wider (eds)  
Mosby Elsevier, 2006  
ISBN 0-723-43383-6

***Taking Control of Cancer***

Beverley van der Molen  
Class Publishing, 2003  
ISBN 1-85959-091-8

***The Bristol Approach to Living with Cancer***

Helen Cooke  
Robinson, 2003  
ISBN 1-84119-680-0

***The Key Model – A New Strategy for Cancer Recovery***

Dr Seán Collins & Rhoda Draper  
Ardagh Clinic, 2004  
ISBN 0-95214-445-X

***44½ Choices You Can Make If You Have Cancer***

Sheila Dainow, Jo Wright & Vicki Golding  
Newleaf, 2001  
ISBN 0-71713-222-6

**Explaining cancer to young children*****Badger's Parting Gifts***

Susan Varley  
HarperCollins, 1994  
ISBN 0-00664-317-5

***The Secret C: Straight Talking About Cancer***

Julie A. Stokes  
Winston's Wish, 2000  
ISBN 0-95391-230-2

***Why Mum? A Small Child with a Big Problem***

Catherine Thornton  
Veritas, 2005  
ISBN 1-85390-891-6

## Irish Cancer Society Services

The Irish Cancer Society (ICS) funds a range of cancer support services that provide care and support for people with cancer at home and in hospital. If you would like more information on any of these services, call the National Cancer Helpline **1800 200 700**.

### Cancer Information Service (CIS)

The Society also provides a Cancer Information Service with a wide range of services. The **National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700** is a freefone service that gives confidential information, support and guidance to people concerned about cancer. It is staffed by specialist cancer nurses who have access to the most up-to-date facts on cancer-related issues such as prevention of cancer, risk factors, screening, dealing with a cancer diagnosis, different treatments, counselling and other support services. The helpline can also put patients in contact with the various support groups that are available.

The helpline operates Monday to Thursday from 9am to 7pm, and every Friday from 9am to 5pm. All queries or concerns about cancer can be emailed to the CIS at [helpline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:helpline@irishcancer.ie). The **walk-in caller service** allows anyone with concerns about cancer to freely visit the Society to discuss them in private. **CancerForum** is a bulletin board on our website ([www.irishcancer.ie](http://www.irishcancer.ie)) that gives the public the chance to post their comments. The **CancerChat** service is a live chatroom with a link to a CIS nurse.

### Action Breast Cancer

Action Breast Cancer (ABC) is a project of the ICS that provides breast cancer information and support and also funds breast cancer research. Its services are free and confidential. They include a national helpline, publications, one-to-one support, breast awareness talks, and advocacy. The ABC helpline **1800 90 30 40** operates weekdays from 9am to 5pm.

### Action Prostate Cancer

Action Prostate Cancer is a project of the ICS that provides prostate cancer information and support. A Prostate Cancer Information

Service (PCIS) offers confidential information, support and guidance to people concerned about any aspect of prostate cancer. The PCIS is staffed by specialist nurses and can be contacted on freefone **1800 380 380** from Monday to Thursday, 9am to 7pm, and on Friday from 9am to 5pm. Or you can email [prostate@irishcancer.ie](mailto:prostate@irishcancer.ie).

### Night nursing

The Irish Cancer Society can provide a night nurse, free of charge, for up to 70 hours (mainly at night) to families who are caring for a seriously ill person at home. If you need help, you can find out more about this service from a member of the homecare team, your GP or local public health nurse.

### Oncology liaison nurses

The Irish Cancer Society funds oncology liaison nurses who provide information as well as emotional and practical support to the patient and his or her family. Oncology liaison nurses work as part of the hospital team in specialist cancer centres.

### Counselling

Coping with a cancer diagnosis can be very stressful. Patients and their families sometimes find it difficult to come to terms with the illness. Indeed many people feel that they cannot talk to a close friend or relative. Counselling can provide emotional support in a safe and confidential environment. Call 1800 200 700 to find out about counselling services provided by the Irish Cancer Society and services available in your area.

### Homecare nurses

Homecare nurses are specialist palliative care nurses who offer advice on pain control and other symptoms. These nurses work with GPs and public health nurses to form homecare teams bringing care and support, free of charge, to patients in their own homes. Based in local hospitals, health centres and hospices, they can be contacted through your GP or public health nurse. The Irish Cancer Society contributes financially to this service.

## Cancer support groups

The Irish Cancer Society funds a range of support groups set up to support you and your family at the time of diagnosis, throughout treatment and afterwards. The Society offers emotional support and free counselling at its offices in 43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin in a safe and confidential environment. It provides one-to-one support with trained counsellors but, where appropriate, a spouse, partner, child or significant other may be invited to join. They will be offered up to a total of eight one-hour sessions, free of charge.

At present, the Society funds counselling services in Cork, Wexford, Mayo, Louth, Laois and Limerick. Call 1800 200 700 to find out about counselling provided by the Irish Cancer Society and services available in your area.

## Cancer information booklets

These booklets provide information on all aspects of cancer and its treatment. They also offer practical advice on learning how to cope with your illness. The booklets are available free of charge from the Irish Cancer Society.

## Patient grants

A diagnosis of cancer can bring with it the added burden of financial worries. In certain circumstances, the Irish Cancer Society can provide immediate cash assistance to patients in need. If you would like to request this kind of help, contact your oncology or medical social worker at the hospital where you have been treated. He/she should then make the request in writing to the Irish Cancer Society.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to extend a special word of thanks to the following for their invaluable contributions to this booklet and/or previous editions:

Eileen O'Donovan, Cancer Information Nurse

Clare Horgan, Lymphoedema Therapist and RGN

Anne Marie McGrath, Complementary Therapist and RGN

Irish Medicines Board

### Would you like more information?

We hope this booklet has been of help to you. If you would like more information or someone to talk to, please phone our National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700.

### Would you like to be a patient reviewer?

If you have any suggestions as to how this booklet could be improved, we would be delighted to hear from you. The views of patients, relatives, carers and friends are all welcome. Your comments would help us greatly in the preparation of future information booklets for people with cancer and their carers.

If you wish to email your comments, have an idea for a new booklet or would like to review any of our booklets, please contact us at **reviewers@irishcancer.ie**. If you would prefer to phone or write to us, see contact details below.

### Would you like to help us?

The Irish Cancer Society relies entirely on voluntary contributions from the public to fund its programmes of patient care, education and research. This includes our patient booklets. If you would like to support our work in any way – perhaps by making a donation or by organising a local fundraising event – please contact us.

**Irish Cancer Society, 43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4.**

**Tel: 01 231 0500 Email: [info@irishcancer.ie](mailto:info@irishcancer.ie) Website: [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)**

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The mission of the Irish Cancer Society is to play a vital role in achieving world-class cancer services in Ireland, to ensure fewer people get cancer and those that do have better outcomes. Our goals are focused around prevention, survival and quality of life, with three programme areas to achieve them: advocacy, cancer services and research.

