

# Understanding Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer, their carers, family and friends



**Cancer  
Council**  
Western Australia

Understanding Complementary Therapies  
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*<sup>1</sup>Cancer Council WA's Complementary and Integrative Therapy Advisory Group oversees the development of policies and guidelines for credentialing and application of appropriate therapies. This group incorporates membership from a range of external stakeholders, and Cancer Council staff.*

*<sup>2</sup>SolarisCare Foundation aims to improve the quality of life of cancer patients and their carers by providing them with support services to cope with the emotional and physical side effects of cancer diagnosis, treatment and recovery.*

*Front cover: Scaevola Aemula, "Purple Fanfare" - Western Australian wildflower.*

## About this booklet

This booklet has been written to help you understand more about complementary therapies which many people want to try when they find out they have cancer.

If you want to try complementary therapies, it is important that you discuss this with your doctors and health professionals.

There are many reasons why people consider complementary therapies, which are generally used in conjunction with conventional cancer treatment. Sometimes called natural therapies, they may offer you physical, emotional and spiritual support, reduced side effects from medical treatment and improved quality of life.

Some people also think about trying alternative therapies, which are used instead of conventional treatment, but this booklet provides a basic overview on the role of complementary therapies in cancer care.

Finding out about non-conventional therapies can assist you to make decisions about your overall treatment plan for cancer. However, it is important that you weigh up the pros and cons based on your individual case. This includes thinking about your needs and how they can be addressed, as well as the evidence about a therapy's effectiveness and safety.

We cannot advise you on whether to use complementary therapies or not, nor which therapy would be most suitable for you, but we hope that the information in this booklet will answer some of your questions and help you to access further resources. The question checklist and glossary should assist you when you talk to health professionals.

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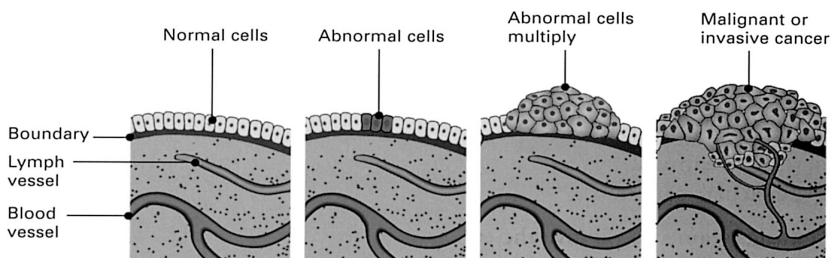
# What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease of the body's cells, which are the body's basic building blocks. Our bodies constantly make new cells: to help us grow, to replace worn-out cells, or to heal damaged cells after an injury.

Normally, cells grow and multiply in an orderly way, but sometimes something goes wrong with this process and cells grow in an uncontrolled way. This uncontrolled growth may result in abnormal blood or lymphocyte cells, or a lump called a tumour. A tumour can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer). A benign tumour does not spread outside its normal boundary to other parts of the body. However, if a benign tumour continues to grow at the original site, it may cause a problem by pressing on nearby organs.

A malignant tumour is made up of cancer cells. When it first develops, this tumour may not have invaded nearby tissue. This is known as a cancer in-situ, or carcinoma in-situ.

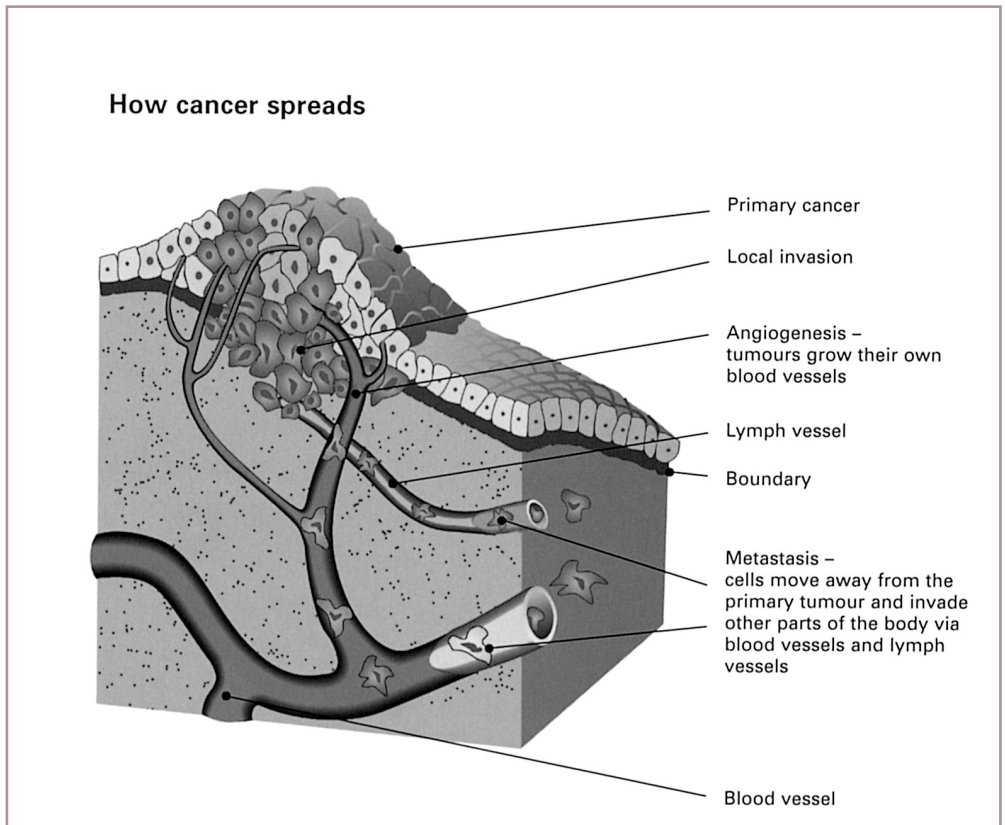
## The beginnings of cancer



Some benign tumours are precancerous and may progress to cancer if left untreated. Other benign tumours do not develop into cancer.

As the tumour grows, it invades surrounding tissue, becoming invasive cancer. An invasive cancer that has not spread to other parts of the body is called primary cancer.

Sometimes cells move away from the primary cancer and invade other organs and bones. When these cells reach a new site, they may continue to grow and form another tumour. This is called a secondary cancer or metastasis.



# How cancer is treated

## Conventional treatments

Conventional treatments are widely accepted and practised by the mainstream medical community, such as GPs, oncologists and other medical specialists. They are based on scientific evidence (see the box opposite).

These treatments are also called medical, proven, orthodox, standard or mainstream treatments.

The five main types of conventional treatments are surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and immunotherapy. Usually the aim of these treatments is to cure the disease by removing cancerous cells from the body. Sometimes the treatments are unable to cure cancer, but they help to relieve symptoms and slow or stop the spread of cancer.

It is common for people to have a combination of treatments, as well as medication during or following treatment for cancer or complications from it.

The choice of treatment depends on a number of factors, such as:

- The type and location of the cancer.
- The stage (spread) and grade (aggressiveness) of the cancer.
- The age and general health of the person with cancer.
- The risks and benefits of the treatment for the individual.
- Side effects.
- Personal choice.

For further information on conventional treatments, contact the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for free copies of *Understanding Radiation Therapy*, *Understanding Chemotherapy* and other booklets about different cancer types.

## What is scientific evidence?

Conventional cancer treatments have been through a range of tests to prove they are safe and either cure the cancer, slow its growth or control the symptoms.

New treatments are first tested in laboratories and then usually on large groups of people. This is called a clinical trial.

The strongest evidence comes from clinical trials that involve two groups of people. One group is given the promising new treatment while the other group is given the existing treatment or a placebo (a substance that seems like medicine but has no active ingredient). Results of these trials are published in medical journals whose articles are evaluated by independent experts (peer reviewed). If the new treatment works better, or helps more people than the usual treatment, it eventually becomes available to everyone. This process provides the scientific evidence.

Whereas conventional cancer treatments are relatively new, many complementary therapies have been used for hundreds or thousands of years. Their effectiveness has been based on trial and error and knowledge about their use has been passed down through the generations by word or mouth. Traditional therapists don't always know how or why a remedy works, but they use it because of a long-standing belief that it is effective.

With the growing interest in complementary therapies around the world, many therapies are coming under scientific scrutiny to determine whether they are clinically effective and if they are, how they actually work. As there are often many factors making up a complementary therapy treatment, it is sometimes difficult to determine which part of the treatment is causing a specific effect.

## Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies are used in conjunction with conventional treatments and are increasingly considered an important part of supportive care, which helps people address a wide range of challenges beyond medical treatment for cancer.

These therapies are sometimes called complementary medicine, holistic therapies, natural therapies, traditional therapies or traditional medicine. Integrative medicine is when conventional treatments are combined with evidence-based complementary therapies.

Complementary therapies may help you to cope better with symptoms of cancer and side effects caused by conventional treatments. Complementary therapies may also improve your well-being throughout the different stages of your treatment and recovery from cancer. These therapies may also provide comfort and relief for people having palliative care.

Complementary health practitioners usually focus on you as a whole person - both your physical and emotional health - and not just on the part of your body that is affected by cancer.

“A surgeon looks at your anatomy and is mainly concerned with removing the cancerous growths. An oncologist has a specific treatment program aimed at killing the cancer cells. Although they were caring people, they were not looking at the whole picture. It was a great benefit to have someone else to look at the big picture. That’s what my natural therapist did for me.”

*Tania (breast cancer)*

Examples of complementary therapies include:

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Counselling
- Flower remedies
- Herbal medicine
- Massage
- Meditation
- Music therapy
- Nutrition
- Reflexology

A list of the complementary therapies included in this book is on page 28.

Although not all complementary therapies have been scientifically proven to work and their safety and effectiveness is not always clear, research and clinical trials are increasing to determine the value of these therapies and how they may be able to help people with cancer.

It is important to know that complementary therapies are usually safe when you see qualified practitioners who have an understanding of the needs of people with cancer. However, you should weigh up the pros and cons of using these therapies and discuss your decision with your doctor, to minimise the risk of any problems.

Conventional medicine can also be holistic. In multidisciplinary care, different health professionals work together as a team so that the many aspects of a person's physical, emotional and spiritual health can be considered.

## Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies are commonly defined as those used in place of conventional treatments. These therapies may be harmful if people with cancer delay or stop using conventional treatments in favour of them.

Alternative therapies are sometimes called unproven or unconventional treatments.

Alternative therapies may carry claims that they stop cancer growth or cure cancer. They are often expensive and may promote extreme dietary and lifestyle protocols. Many therapies have not been scientifically tested, so there is no proof that they work and their side effects are not always known. Some therapies have been researched and proven not to work.

Examples of alternative therapies are microwave therapy, ozone therapy, magnet therapy, coffee enemas, or taking high-dose supplements of vitamins or other compounds such as laetrile (vitamin B17), shark cartilage, mistletoe extract or melatonin.

Nutrition is an important part of cancer care but when a specific type of diet is used in place of conventional cancer treatment in the hope that it will cure cancer, it is considered an alternative therapy. Sometimes these diets omit major food groups or recommend extreme practices, such as eating one kind of food or drinking nothing but fruit and vegetable juices. Examples of extreme diets promoted for cancer control include the macrobiotic diet and the Gerson diet.

While alternative therapies are mentioned occasionally in this booklet, the main focus of *Understanding Complementary Therapies* is to detail treatments and techniques that are generally considered to be safe to use during or after conventional cancer treatment.

For information on therapies or treatments not covered in this book, call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

## Warning bells

Unfortunately, some people will try to take advantage of others who are in a vulnerable situation. People at any stage of cancer are often targeted with offers of cures that are too good to be true. If you are feeling helpless or unsure about different treatments, talk to your doctor or a counsellor.

Be wary of the following situations:

- The practitioner has no qualifications or studied at an unaccredited college or university.
- The practitioner tells you not to have conventional treatment, or that medical treatment will stop their treatment from working.
- The practitioner asks you not to speak about the treatment with your doctors, or won't tell you the secret ingredients.
- The treatment claims to cure all cancers.
- The practitioner says there are clinical studies for the remedy's effectiveness but does not show you proof.
- The treatment costs a lot of money or you need to pay in advance for several months supply of a remedy.
- You need to travel overseas to have the treatment.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) publicises health and medical scams. Visit [www.scamwatch.gov.au](http://www.scamwatch.gov.au) or [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au) for more information.

# Complementary therapies - your questions answered

## Who uses complementary therapies?

An Australian study conducted in 2008 revealed that 65% of cancer patients use some form of complementary therapies<sup>1</sup>. Earlier studies have shown different results: 17.1% (2005)<sup>2</sup>, 52% (1998)<sup>3</sup> and 22% (1996)<sup>4</sup>. (See page 119 for references). The variation may be due to the types of complementary therapies included in the studies.

The study in 2005 showed that females were more likely to use complementary therapies than males and the longer someone had cancer, the more likely they were to try them.

"I went through conventional treatment, but I wanted to do something positive for myself, so I saw a traditional Chinese medicine therapist. I don't know whether it was because I felt empowered or whether it was actually the herbs, but compared to other people I knew going through the same type of conventional treatment, I felt I was faring pretty well."

*Esther (breast cancer)*

## Why do people use these therapies?

There are many reasons why people use complementary therapies if they have been diagnosed with cancer. Often people wish to create a healthier lifestyle and try something more natural to avoid or reduce the toxicity of conventional therapies. Sometimes people use these therapies because they feel empowered (in control) and that they are doing something positive for themselves. Other people are encouraged by their families and friends to try something different.

Many people are also motivated to use complementary therapies to:

- Help manage the side effects of cancer treatment.
- Boost the immune system to help fight infection.
- Strengthen the body to cope with surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy.
- Try to reduce the need for invasive, painful or expensive conventional treatments.
- Cope with physical changes to the body and emotional challenges that can affect self-esteem.
- Adjust to changes in libido, sexual functioning and intimate relationships.
- Enhance quality of life.
- Improve comfort and peace of mind.
- Help with palliative care.
- Try as many options as possible.

## Should I use complementary therapies?

You need to decide for yourself whether or not to use complementary therapies. It is your right to make this decision - no-one can make it for you. Some people have used these therapies prior to a diagnosis of cancer and want to incorporate them into their overall cancer treatment right away. Other people have never used them but wish to try them in the hope that they will give their body the best ability to fight the cancer. Many people don't want to use complementary therapies at all, or they only think about using them if they are referred to palliative care.

The aim of this booklet is to help you make an informed decision by explaining what kinds of therapies are available, their benefits and potential side effects and how to access them safely. Remember to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages and talk to your doctor before using them.

See the websites from pages 93 to 96 for other sources of useful information about cancer and complementary therapies.

"I had 45 skin cancer growths removed from my face and hands over a five year period. It left my skin scarred, irritated, dry and scaly. I saw a naturopath who helped me improve my diet, plus I used aloe vera gel and started to protect my skin outdoors. My skin problems cleared up within a few weeks."

*Jim (skin cancer)*

## Palliative care

The information in this booklet is relevant regardless of how cancer may be impacting on your life.

Many people receiving palliative care also use a variety of complementary therapies to help them feel better physically and emotionally. Some examples include taking herbs to ease constipation; meditating to reduce anxiety; or having massages to reduce or relieve pain.

If you have been referred to palliative care services, you may wonder whether there are any complementary or alternative therapies that offer some chance of a cure. You may think you have nothing to lose so you're willing to try anything to get better. However, you still need to consider the risks and benefits of using these therapies.

For general information about palliative care or advanced cancer, call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

## Which therapies work?

Cancer Council supports therapies that have been proven to be safe and effective in scientific (clinical) studies. Not all therapies in this book have been proven to be clinically effective, but anecdotal (personal) evidence from patients suggests they are beneficial. SolarisCare is currently researching some of these complementary therapies. Evidence supporting the different therapies is included in their individual descriptions in Mind-body techniques, Body-based practices, Biological based therapies and other therapies.

In clinical trials, some therapies have been shown to be helpful for the various effects of cancer and its treatment:

- Counselling, meditation, relaxation, support groups: help reduce stress and improve self esteem.
- Art and music therapy: provide focused attention, which aids relaxation, pain reduction and the expression of feelings.
- Spiritual practices: help reduce stress, instil peace and improve one's ability to manage challenges.
- Massage: can help reduce pain, fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, depression and nausea.
- Aromatherapy: improves sleep and aids relaxation.
- Reflexology: reduces anxiety.
- Acupuncture: reduces nausea, vomiting, fatigue and pain.
- Yoga and physical activity: improve sleep, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue and muscle wasting.
- Tai chi: relieves pain, improves flexibility and strength and reduces stress.
- Qi gong: improves quality of life, reduces fatigue, pain and side effects of treatment and improves mood.
- Nutrition: helps wounds and damaged tissue to heal better and improves the body's immune system.
- Herbal medicine: relieves digestive disturbances, improves appetite and increases resistance to infections.

## Will I get side effects?

Although complementary therapies are usually safe and most people use them without incident, they can also occasionally cause side effects in some people.

Side effects are rare, but it is a good idea to discuss them with your therapists so you know what to expect and what to do if they occur.

Potential side effects and other considerations are also discussed under the individual therapies from pages 28 to 74.

According to the Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee, in 2007 there were 10,509 reported adverse drug reactions, 119 of which related to herbal medicine. This equates to 1.13% of all reported reactions to drugs and other medications. For more information, see [www.tga.gov.au/adr/adrac.htm](http://www.tga.gov.au/adr/adrac.htm).

## Consumer complaints

If you do experience side effects or discomfort from a therapy, or if some other serious problem occurs, talk to your practitioner who should assess the situation and work out how your treatment needs to be altered so the problem doesn't arise again. If the problem is unable to be resolved, consider the following options:

- If the practitioner belongs to a professional association, you can contact that association with a formal complaint. The association may be able to investigate and decide what action to take based on the evidence provided by you and the practitioner.
- The Health Consumers Council WA represents the consumers' voice in health policy, planning, research and service delivery, advocating on behalf of consumers to doctors, other health professionals, hospitals and the wider health system. Call 1800 620 780 for further information.

# Complementary therapies explained

## Holistic approaches to health care

Most individual complementary therapies are part of wider systems of holistic health care. Holistic health care means considering all aspects of a person's well-being by addressing their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

There are three main holistic health care systems from around the world that are practised in Australia: naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and ayurvedic medicine from India.

Their origins differ, but they promote similar concepts:

- The body needs to be balanced physically, emotionally and spiritually to be healthy.
- Ill health often has more than one cause (multifactorial).
- The body has a vital force or vital energy that reflects its level of health and well-being.
- The body has a strong ability to heal itself, given the right environment.

These holistic health care systems also offer:

- Body-based therapies applied externally, such as massage.
- Herbs, food or nutritional remedies.
- Mind-body techniques for emotional and spiritual well-being, such as meditation.
- Healthy dietary and lifestyle principles that promote a balanced intake of nourishing food, minimal alcohol, no smoking, daily exercise, adequate sleep and relaxation.

## Naturopathy

In Australia, naturopathic training usually consists of studies at a private college or university in nutrition, herbal medicine, flower remedies and/or homoeopathy and a body-based practice such as massage or reflexology.

The foundations of naturopathy are that if you embrace a balanced, healthy diet and lifestyle, this will help lead you to optimal health and well-being. Health does not just mean the absence of disease, but also stability and vitality in mind and body. If one part of the body is affected by ill health and is not corrected, eventually it leads to ill health in other parts of the body. The mind, body and spirit are all connected.

By addressing both the cause and effect of symptoms using a unique combination of diet, bodywork and ingested remedies (taken orally), the body is strengthened and can restore itself to a healthier, more balanced state.

For the person with cancer, naturopathy may help address side effects of conventional treatment or symptoms of cancer. It can nurture the body and strengthen overall vitality, which helps to reduce discomfort and improve well-being.

**What to expect:** After taking a detailed case history, a naturopath prepares a comprehensive treatment plan, which may include dietary adjustments, exercise or bodywork and herbal, homoeopathic or nutritional remedies. The individual combination of remedies gives your body the tools it needs to improve health and feel better.

**Evidence:** Some aspects of naturopathy, such as massage and nutrition, have convincing clinical evidence for their benefits for cancer patients; other aspects such as herbal medicine, have mixed levels of evidence. See individual therapies for further information.

## Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) considers that the development of illness, including cancer, is closely related to the invasion of pathogenic (disease-causing) factors, poor diet, emotional upsets and general weakness of qi or energy (see below). Sometimes the qi is said to be blocked or stagnant.

TCM practitioners consider the patient's overall condition rather than focusing on the illness itself or the particular symptoms. TCM may help cancer patients strengthen their vital force and cope with the side effects of conventional treatment.

**What to expect:** A TCM practitioner will take a detailed case history and may use diagnostic techniques such as pulse or tongue analysis to find out about the flow of qi and imbalances in your body. Treatment may include acupuncture, dietary changes or herbal remedies.

**Evidence:** Some aspects of TCM have convincing clinical evidence for their benefits for cancer patients. See individual therapies for further information, pages 24 to 25.

## Meridians and qi in the body

In traditional Chinese medicine and other medical systems from Asia, it is believed that everyone has a vital energy or vital force known as qi (pronounced 'chee'). Qi flows through the body along pathways called meridians. If the flow of qi is impaired, the body's internal balance is disrupted, which can contribute to physical and emotional disease or discomfort.

By identifying blockages and using pressure on particular points along the meridians to restore the flow of energy, a practitioner helps bring the patient's mind and body back into balance.

Acupressure, acupuncture, qi gong, reiki, shiatsu and tai chi all embrace the concept of qi.

## Tania's story

"I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003. I'd used Chinese herbs and acupuncture for a long time, so I wanted to know whether I could avoid conventional cancer treatment. My therapist advised me against this and she offered to work with my medical team.

I agreed to have surgery, followed by chemotherapy and hormone-suppressant medication. When I spoke to my oncologist about using complementary therapies, he said he couldn't stop me, but he wanted my therapist to know about my medical treatment.

I had acupuncture the day before my operation to help reduce the stress my body and I would be put under. After surgery, my therapist came to the hospital and gave me acupuncture in my legs to help build my blood, clear toxins from my body and restore my energy. Later, I also had acupuncture for the nausea caused by chemotherapy and for the hot flushes and lethargy I had from going through a drug-induced menopause.

My therapist also gave me different mixtures of Chinese herbs depending on my symptoms. For constipation, I had a traditional laxative formula that was much gentler and more effective than the conventional laxative I had been prescribed. My therapist also advised me on ways to improve my diet and choose foods that were rich in nutrients and fibre. I ate red fruits and vegetables to improve the health of my blood. Pears and pear juice helped the constipation.

Comparing my experience to others in my support group, I feel I benefited from my TCM therapist's contribution. My side effects didn't seem as bad as other people's and it was great to have someone else looking at the bigger picture of my health and recovery."

## Ayurvedic medicine

Ayurveda originates from India but training is available in Australia. Practitioners learn a range of therapies that include nutrition and herbal medicine, massage, meditation and yoga.

The foundation of ayurvedic medicine is that health is obtained when the mind, body and spirit are in harmony and one's vital life force is in balance. Once these imbalances are assessed, the different therapies help to restore balance and strength to the body.

**What to expect:** An ayurvedic practitioner also obtains a comprehensive case history and assesses vital force and balance in the body, often using pulse and tongue analysis. A tailor-made treatment plan is devised to re-establish harmony in the body.

**Evidence:** There have been limited clinical trials of ayurvedic herbs for people with cancer, but meditation and yoga have a strong evidence base to support their use.

## Remedies from different cultures

In Australia there is a lot of cultural diversity, which influences the way individual people and their families perceive cancer and how they want it to be treated. Many people may know about medicines or treatments from their own traditions, which they wish to draw on as part of their complementary cancer care.

For example, there is a range of remedies made from plants and animals that have been used traditionally for thousands of years by Aboriginal people. Some indigenous people with a cancer diagnosis may wish to have guidance from a traditional doctor or elder who is familiar with bush medicine and Aboriginal spirituality.

If you want to use traditional remedies from your culture, it is important to discuss this with your doctor and to ask the same questions as you would for the other types of complementary therapies listed in this booklet.

You may also like to talk to the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 about different therapies.

## Individual complementary therapies

Most therapies are valuable for the mind, body and spirit combined because the body's structure, function, emotions and energy are all linked. For example, massage is a body-based practice, but as well as relaxing muscles, it may also reduce anxiety. Thus it helps both physical and emotional aspects of health.

In this booklet therapies have been categorised according to whether they are initially directed towards:

- Your emotional (mental) health, e.g. Mind-body techniques such as music therapy or meditation.
- Your physical (structural) health, e.g. Body-based practices such as massage or qi gong.
- Your biochemical (internal) health, e.g. Biological-based therapies such as herbal medicine or nutrition.

The following chart lists the different therapies that are detailed in the next four chapters. Some of the therapies could be classified in more than one category.

## Different types of therapies

Mind-body techniques	Relaxation and meditation	28
	Counselling	29
	Hypnotherapy	31
	Life coaching	32
	Art therapy	33
	Music therapy	34
	Support groups	35
	Spirituality	36
Body-based techniques	Massage	40
	Aromatherapy	41
	Reflexology	42
	Energy therapies	44
	Acupuncture	45
	Yoga	48
	Tai Chi	49
	Qi gong	50
	Other active exercise techniques	51
Biological-based techniques	Naturopathic nutrition	55
	Western herbal medicine	57
	Chinese herbal medicine	58
Other therapies	Flower remedies	63
	Homoeopathy	64

# Mind-body techniques

Mind-body techniques encourage people to focus on issues that are impacting on their emotional or spiritual well-being. Through discussion and exploration of their unmet needs, people can learn strategies to overcome or cope with problems that are causing them anxiety, stress or depression. These techniques can help people create positive emotional change, which can influence physical well-being.

Mind-body techniques may also be called psychological techniques, emotional therapies or spiritual healing.

Techniques include practitioner-led therapies such as counselling or hypnotherapy and self-help techniques such as relaxation, meditation, art therapy and music therapy. Support groups offer informal counselling with peers where the act of talking, listening and sharing ideas can be therapeutic.

Although counselling and support groups are now considered part of standard cancer care, they are discussed here because they complement conventional medical treatment for cancer. Spirituality is also discussed because of the important part it plays in many people's lives and its value in providing emotional support.

Therapists practising mind-body techniques have a range of qualifications and educational experiences. For example, a hypnotherapist or counsellor may have a one-year diploma from a private college, while a clinical psychologist or an art therapist should have a Masters degree from a university. As well as having the appropriate qualifications, it is also important that you and your therapist can communicate effectively and you feel comfortable during a session. The relationship between you and the therapist is critical for the success of the therapy.

**Benefits:** Scientific studies suggest that mind-body techniques can be of great assistance to people who have cancer or are recovering from it. These therapies allow people to explore their individual emotions that friends and family may not be able to relate to. Evidence also shows that mind-body techniques may help reduce feelings of pain, anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, fear, stress and insomnia, all of which are commonly experienced by people with cancer and which can negatively impact on a person's overall well-being. By choosing to use self-help techniques, people may feel more in control of their situation, more relaxed and less fearful of the future.

**What to expect:** There are various ways to approach emotional healing, but usually you will have the opportunity to discuss your thoughts, feelings and concerns about your health and other issues in a safe, confidential environment. Some mind-body techniques encourage you to use activities such as meditation, art, music or prayer either to express your concerns in a non-verbal manner, or to provide an opportunity to stop focusing directly on problems and to gain pleasure, relief or a sense of peace while doing so.

For information on the differences between a counsellor, psychologist and psychiatrist, see page 34.

**Side effects:** Mind-body techniques are very low-risk in terms of side-effects, but sometimes people feel overwhelmed by the emotions they experience during or after a session.

**Other considerations:**

- Not all therapies appeal to everyone, as some might seem confronting. Read about different therapies to get an insight into what might benefit you based on your values, attitudes and needs.
- If you wish to see a psychologist or counsellor, ask your doctor for a referral or recommendation.

## Relaxation and meditation

While relaxation can refer to any activity that someone finds enjoyable and stress relieving there is a particular technique called 'relaxation', which can have many benefits for people with cancer. Relaxation usually includes a series of muscle loosening exercises that cause the body to become physically and mentally relaxed. Deep, slow breathing assists in the release of muscle tension and visualisation can help the mind to find peace.

Meditation is an ancient practice that focuses on breathing techniques and quietening the mind. In mindfulness meditation, people are encouraged to concentrate on all aspects of the activity - from the way they are sitting and breathing to how they feel throughout. This awareness brings a new level of appreciation to people about their bodies and the surrounding environment. Such focus keeps people's minds in the present. Guided imagery, or visualisation, is a type of meditation that draws on imagination to produce healing thoughts.

Relaxation is similar to meditation and has many of the same outcomes. During relaxation, people are usually thinking continually as they are led through a series of actions to help relax their bodies. In meditation, the primary focus is on concentrating the mind on one thing only, such as breathing, a chant or a particular image.

**What to expect:** Lying or sitting in a comfortable position, you are led through a series of exercises that focus on breath work and calming the mind. During a relaxation session, you may also do some stretching, followed by gentle exercises to loosen your muscles. Often, serene music is played to create a peaceful environment. Although you may feel sleepy, the idea is not to sleep, but to remain centred on your breathing or another aspect of the technique. After a period of relaxation, you will usually be prompted to stay awake to enjoy your relaxed feeling.

**Evidence:** Many clinical studies have shown that relaxation is beneficial for people undergoing chemotherapy, radiotherapy and other cancer treatments. It can help to reduce anxiety, stress and tension, physical pain and discomfort, fatigue and depression. Studies on meditation have also shown it benefits patients with cancer by enhancing physical relaxation, mood and improving sleep, symptoms of stress, self-esteem and general well-being.

Cancer Council WA, SolarisCare and some cancer support groups, health retreats and community centres offer relaxation or meditation programs. A free meditation CD that will guide you through the different techniques is available by contacting the Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20.

## Counselling

Through discussions with a counsellor or psychologist, you can identify problems and explore ways of resolving negative thoughts and feelings that impact on your health and day-to-day life. Counselling allows you to express your emotions in a safe, objective environment, helping to improve self-esteem, communication, relationships and specific difficulties that are causing anguish, such as trauma, grief or sexuality issues.

**What to expect:** Consultations are usually face to face, but if you live remotely or require crisis counselling, you may talk with your therapist over the phone.

A counsellor will ask questions about the problems you are facing and will help you to clarify your thoughts so you can work out how to resolve these challenges yourself. Sometimes a counsellor will simply provide a non-judgmental, listening ear to allow you to talk through events that have caused you confusion, grief, anxiety, guilt or conflicting emotions.

**Evidence:** There is long-established evidence of the benefits of counselling, however, it is important that people find a suitably qualified therapist who is appropriate for their needs.

## Differences between counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists

**Counsellor:** A counsellor's education may range from a vocational certificate in counselling through to university level studies in psychology or social work. Counsellors learn how to communicate effectively with clients to help them come up with strategies for dealing with problems. Counsellors usually work in a similar way to a psychologist who has specialised in counselling. They do not prescribe medication.

**Clinical Psychologist:** A registered clinical psychologist in WA has studied psychology at an undergraduate level, then has either undertaken postgraduate studies in psychology or completed two years of supervised clinical practice. There are many fields in which a psychologist can specialise, but those who offer counselling use their deep understanding of the workings of the mind and people's character traits to guide clients through their difficulties. They do not prescribe medication.

**Psychiatrist:** A psychiatrist has trained initially as a medical doctor and then specialised in the field of psychiatry, which is the study of mental illness. As well as discussing issues with a client, a psychiatrist may prescribe medication to help a range of mental conditions. If you are severely depressed, you may be referred to a psychiatrist, who can work through coping strategies and may prescribe antidepressants.

## Hypnotherapy

Through deep relaxation, a therapist assists people to become more aware of their inner thoughts. This can help them overcome mental blocks that have previously stopped them from dealing with problems such as anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, pain, insomnia and unwanted habits.

**What to expect:** Your therapist will take a case history and will ask you what you want to get out of hypnotherapy so you can set some goals together. The therapist will then help you relax to achieve what is known as an altered state of consciousness (a change in your awareness). This allows your subconscious (inner mind) to focus on your treatment goals, which, once the session draws to a close, become more achievable for your conscious (aware) mind.

**Evidence:** Hypnotherapy has been clinically tested with positive results for pain and anxiety reduction and to prepare people physically and emotionally for surgery. Studies show it has promising results for wound healing and is beneficial for reducing nausea and vomiting. It is also used for addictions so may help people give up smoking or drinking alcohol.

## Life coaching

Life coaching is about helping people develop in their personal, spiritual, physical and professional lives. It encourages people to live enjoyable lives and is focused on finding solutions and getting results. Life coaching allows people to look forward and make positive changes for their future.

**What to expect:** You will work collaboratively with your life coach who helps you become open to change and learn how to acquire new attitudes and habits that will assist you in achieving your goals. The relationship between you and your coach enhances your ability to clarify your thoughts about what you want in life and to reassess your beliefs, values and rules that may have prevented you from experiencing fulfilment in the past.

Sessions can be face to face or over the phone, or, more recently over the Internet.

**Evidence:** There is limited clinical evidence available about the benefits of life coaching however, exploratory studies have shown that participants in a program can experience enhanced mental health, quality of life and goal attainment.

## Art therapy

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy (psychological healing), in which participants create pieces of visual art to help them express their feelings in a non-verbal way. An art therapist guides you through exploring your images, which can help you understand your emotions and concerns. Together you can work through issues that surface from your art. Other benefits include distraction from worries or pain, improved mood and stress reduction.

**What to expect:** Art therapy may be done individually or in groups, programs are run by the Cancer Council WA and SolarisCare. You do not need to have artistic talent to benefit. Your image may be created by drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or digitally. The emphasis on your work is the process, not the end result. As well as creating an image, you will have an opportunity to discuss the work with the therapist - either your process or what the end result means to you.

**Evidence:** Anecdotal evidence suggests art therapy is effective in relieving anxiety and other emotional symptoms connected with cancer. One clinical study showed that art therapy helped reduce tiredness, anxiety, pain and depression for the duration of the session.

“The most significant change that occurred for me from art therapy was finding a way to express difficult feelings. Sometimes there aren’t words to describe what you’ve been through. Yet, art therapy helped me find a way to share my experience. It was very positive.”

*Ray (prostate cancer)*

## Music therapy

Music therapy aims to improve health and well-being through the creative use of music. A music therapist guides people in engaging with different aspects of music, such as lyric writing, singing, playing instruments, or simply relaxing to different sounds and harmonies. Music therapy can help people express themselves, feel more in control, focus on healing, be less anxious and just enjoy themselves in the moment.

**What to expect:** This therapy is used in a number of cancer centres around Australia. You don't need to have any musical skills to participate or benefit. The way a music therapy session unfolds is variable, as it depends on the needs of the participants. You may actively participate by playing instruments, singing or composing, or you may simply enjoy listening to music and discussing how it has affected you.

**Evidence:** Studies have shown that music therapy can benefit patients with cancer by helping them to cope with pain, anxiety, depression and nausea.

## Support groups

Getting in touch with other people who have been through a similar experience to you can be very beneficial. Groups offer practical and emotional support and can be helpful at all stages of cancer. Being part of a group provides opportunities to share information, experiences and feelings in a caring environment, where everyone is going through the same kind of experience.

Different types of support groups are available for patients, carers and family members. They include:

- Face-to-face support groups, which are often held in community centres or hospitals.
- Tumour - or - situation - specific telephone support groups, which are facilitated by trained counsellors.
- Online discussion forums where people can connect with each other any time.
- Cancer Council Connect, a program that matches you with a volunteer who has been through a similar cancer experience and who understands how you are feeling.

**What to expect:** In these support settings, most people feel they can speak openly, share tips with others and just be themselves. You may find that you feel comfortable talking about your diagnosis and treatment, your relationships and your hopes and fears about the future.

**Evidence:** There is long-standing evidence that cancer support groups are useful and improve quality of life. Cancer Council's research into the effectiveness of these groups found that joining a group help reduce distress, depression and anxiety. Recently, other studies have shown that people using online health forums also benefit.

Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for further information about support groups or join the web-based discussion forum at [www.cancerconnections.com.au](http://www.cancerconnections.com.au).

## Spirituality

Spirituality is very important for many people. Often when people are diagnosed with cancer, this aspect of their lives becomes even more important.

Spirituality is a very individual concept. For some, it may mean being part of an organised religion such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism. For others, spirituality may reflect their own individual beliefs about the universe and their place in it.

Many people benefit greatly from exploring their spirituality, whatever this means to them. Receiving pastoral care from a religious or spiritual adviser or a hospital chaplain can often help people, even if they are not part of an organised religion.

People often find comfort in prayer, meditation or quiet contemplation. They may also derive the same feeling just from being in a peaceful place or appreciating nature.

If you are part of a spiritual or religious community, you may also find solace in the support that these networks offer. For example, you may benefit from:

- Praying or meditating in a group.
- A feeling of unity from the congregation.
- Special healing services for the sick.
- Practical and spiritual support offered by fellow parishioners or members of your religious community.

“Spirituality was very important to me. I had a strong support network at my church and I really believe my faith in God helped me through.”

*Esther (breast cancer)*

## The mind-body connection

The mind and the body are intrinsically linked. When our emotions or mental state is under pressure, our physical body can be affected. Similarly, physical symptoms can have a negative impact on our moods and mental well-being.

Many therapies detailed elsewhere in this booklet could be categorised as mind-body techniques. For example, acupuncture, tai chi and yoga work very strongly on the mind-body connection and can help with emotional problems as well as physical ones. However, as these techniques are directed at the physical body in the first instance (i.e. needling the meridian points or moving the limbs into a certain pose), they are described in the next chapter Body-based practices.

## Body-based practices

Body-based practices, including energy therapies, can be divided into two categories: passive bodywork techniques and active exercise techniques.

Passive bodywork techniques (see pages 44 to 52), such as aromatherapy or reflexology, include therapies where some form of touch or manual pressure is applied to your body or the energy field surrounding your body.

Active exercise techniques (see pages 53 to 58), such as yoga, tai chi and qi gong, require you to actively undertake a series of movements that stimulate and stretch different parts of the body.

Body-based practices have many benefits, such as reducing stress, tension, anxiety, insomnia and pain and increasing energy, vitality and well-being. Exercise - even if gentle - can also improve stamina, muscle tone, flexibility and agility.

Body-based practices may also be referred to as bodywork or physical, manual, stimulatory, structural, tactile, touch, manipulative or exercise therapies. Techniques that involve energy work are sometimes called energy therapies.

Techniques include gentle energy work, such as acupuncture and reiki and moderate bodywork techniques, such as massage and aromatherapy. More vigorous manipulative techniques, such as chiropractic and osteopathy, are not covered in this booklet.

Exercise therapies can be done at a gentle, moderate or vigorous level, depending on your fitness and vitality. See other considerations on page 55 for more information.

## Passive bodywork techniques

A variety of techniques are used for people with cancer or recovering from it. The benefit of the treatment does not just depend on the type of therapy chosen, but also the ability of the practitioner to adjust it to the individual's needs.

**Benefits:** Many scientific studies have been conducted on the effects of body-based techniques for people undergoing cancer treatment, particularly chemotherapy and surgery. Research shows that they can reduce pain, fatigue, anxiety, depression and nausea. Other benefits may include improvements in sleep, neuropathy (nerve damage or disturbance), quality of life, mental clarity and alertness.

**What to expect:** Your practitioner takes a case history and may use diagnostic tools, such as kinesiology (muscle testing) or pulse analysis, to help decide on the best treatment for you. During the treatment, you will probably start to feel relaxed and you may even fall asleep. Afterwards, you may be given some exercises, stretches or other self-help techniques to perform at home.

**Side effects:** As long as you and your therapist make sure your body is not put under too much physical strain, there is a low risk of side effects from bodywork and the experience can be very pleasurable.

Your therapist needs to make the right adjustments for you so that you do not feel pain or uncomfortable pressure. Make sure you tell your therapist during a session how you are feeling. If you experience discomfort and the therapist is unable to make the required adjustments, stop the session.

You should also check how you feel afterwards. If you feel pain, fatigue, bruising or discomfort within 24 hours, your therapist has probably not made the right changes for you. Talk to your therapist so that subsequent sessions can be better tailored to your needs.

## Other considerations:

- Tumour sites, broken skin and sites of radiation should not be massaged, pressured or needled.
- If there is a risk of lymphoedema, the affected area should not be worked on, unless the therapist is qualified in manual lymphatic drainage or lymphoedema management. See [www.lymphoedema.org.au](http://www.lymphoedema.org.au) for more information.
- Some people are allergic or sensitive to the oils used in massage.

## Massage

There are many styles of massage, all of which aim to promote deep relaxation in your body through the release of muscular and emotional tension. When performing bodywork on someone with cancer, therapists need to adjust their pressure.

**What to expect:** The therapist uses a variety of strokes on different parts of the body to increase circulation of blood and lymph and to warm the body, which reduces stiffness and promotes relaxation. Sometimes touch is very gentle, encouraging subtle rebalancing of energy to improve vitality. Some styles of massage are performed with you fully clothed; others usually require you to undress to your underwear so that oil can be applied to your skin.

**Evidence:** Many scientific studies have shown that massage can reduce pain, fatigue, anxiety, depression and nausea, particularly in patients with cancer who have had chemotherapy and surgery.

See the Massage and Hand and Foot Massage Information Sheets available by contacting the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

“Having regular massage means that someone else is keeping an objective eye on my lymphatic arm to assess changes. It’s also helped me maintain my mobility and flexibility, and relieves discomfort and tightness.” *Pam (breast cancer)*

## Aromatherapy

This is the use of aromatic essential oils, extracted from plants, to improve well-being through stimulation of the olfactory (smell) senses. While oils can be used in baths, inhalations or vaporisers (oil burners), aromatherapists mainly use oils during massage. When oils penetrate the skin, they exert positive effects on different systems in the body.

**What to expect:** The aromatherapist blends essential oils and adds them to a base (carrier) oil to apply to your skin during a massage. The blend addresses different moods or symptoms you are experiencing such as fatigue, pain, sleeplessness or nausea.

**Evidence:** Scientific evidence suggests that aromatherapy improves quality of life, particularly in palliative care patients. It also adds to the therapeutic effects of a massage, helping to increase relaxation and a sense of calm, as well as reducing depression and pain.

*“Aromatherapy treatments have allowed me to have up to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. Using essential oils in a burner has assisted me to be more calm and relaxed.”*

*Eleanor (palliative patient with advanced lung cancer)*

## Reflexology

The idea behind this treatment is that the feet and hands are made up of different zones and points that reflect all the organs and systems in the body, like a map. By pressing on reflex points, energy meridians are unblocked and healthy changes can occur in the corresponding parts of the body.

**What to expect:** After talking through your case history, you remove your footwear and lie down. The reflexologist works with their hands on your feet or hands possibly using cream or oil. Usually reflexology feels like a relaxing massage, although sometimes the therapist's touch can be subtle.

**Evidence:** Clinical trials have shown that reflexology reduces pain and anxiety and helps to improve quality of life, particularly for those receiving palliative care.

Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for an Information Sheet.

### Oils used in bodywork

Base oils and essential oils may be used in bodywork.

A base or carrier oil is usually from a kernel or nut, such as almond. Some therapists use mineral oil, as it is odourless. Base oils allow the therapist to work on the skin easily.

Essential oils, such as lavender or tea tree, may be added to base oil, but they should not be used undiluted. These are distilled from aromatic plant parts such as flowers and leaves. Different blends suit various moods and energy levels and may help a range of ailments.

Problems from oils are rare, but some people find they irritate the skin or the smell makes them nauseated. Let your therapist know if you have had reactions to oils in the past, or if you start to feel discomfort during a massage.

## Rodney's story

"In 2002 I was diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma. It's a highly aggressive tumour and required several bouts of chemotherapy over a five-month period. I was hospitalised for three of those months. The chemotherapy left me with a mild form of neuropathy (nerve pain and numbness). Two years later, I still had numbness in my feet and I had trouble solving problems quickly. At times I felt I was very simple, especially when I was tired. My specialist felt I was not likely to improve.

One day in late 2004 I met a reflexologist. I had never heard of this form of therapy. That same night I received a phone call from a friend who was undergoing treatment for breast cancer. She indicated that some of her fellow patients, also suffering from neuropathy, had received some benefit from reflexology. I looked up reflexology on the Internet and then spoke with my GP who was supportive of me trying it. I then rang the reflexologist for an appointment.

I have had about 20 sessions over a three-year period with my reflexologist. The neuropathy has improved, although not completely. I have also suffered from depression and the reflexologist's support has complemented other treatments for this condition.

I've found reflexology to be a positive part of my recovery. I was at complete peace and fully relaxed during the treatment sessions. I wish I had started reflexology earlier and I would have appreciated having reflexology in the hospital when I was having chemotherapy."

## Energy therapies

Energy therapies are used by many people with cancer, as they are very gentle and do not require the therapist to make many adjustments. These therapies are not invasive, but they work on a similar concept to acupuncture in terms of unblocking energy and improving its flow throughout the body to restore balance. The following techniques are popular:

- Bowen therapy
- Reiki
- Healing touch

**What to expect:** Usually a client sits or lies down fully clothed. The therapist may gently touch you or may hold their hands slightly away from your body. Often this generates a feeling of warmth. Sometimes therapists perform manoeuvres on or above the body - these are believed to stimulate the flow of energy. The session is usually very restful.

**Evidence:** Clinical research has not verified the concept of an energy field within or surrounding the body, but anecdotal evidence from patients is that energy therapies provide a deep sense of calm and relaxation, often helping to relieve pain, reduce stiffness and improve posture.

Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for an Information Sheet.

## Acupuncture

Acupuncturists address a range of problems by inserting fine, sterile needles into points along the meridian channels in the body. The ancient philosophy is that this unblocks and moves qi (energy) to strengthen vital force and reduce physical and emotional symptoms. Current science shows that acupuncture stimulates the release of hormones from the nervous system to help regulate the brain and other functions.

**What to expect:** After a consultation, which may include tongue and pulse analysis, the practitioner gently positions needles into points on your body. You may feel a tingling or dull aching sensation, but most people do not feel pain. The needles can be in place for 30 seconds to 30 minutes and may be tweaked by the acupuncturist. Acupuncturists may also implant and cover special needles, which can remain in place for several days. These needles can be pressed to relieve some symptoms such as insomnia or nausea.

**Evidence:** Several clinical trials have shown that acupuncture may relieve cancer-related nausea and vomiting, pain and neuropathy (pain and numbness in limbs). Anecdotal evidence suggests acupuncture is relaxing and reduces anxiety.

Acupressure works on the same principles as acupuncture, but finger pressure on the skin - rather than needles - is used.

Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for an Information Sheet.

"I went to an acupuncturist to help improve my blood counts and vitality. I also had remedial shiatsu to settle my stomach, improve my appetite, reduce constipation and help 'put the pieces back together' that felt fragmented after chemotherapy."

*Julie (breast cancer)*

## Active exercise techniques

Not only is there evidence that exercise helps patients who are recovering from cancer because it improves stamina, vitality, mood and muscle tone, it is also now established that exercise is important for reducing the risk of cancer recurring. As well as the physical benefits, some people find a level of psychological and spiritual well-being from these techniques. Benefits include:

- Maintaining general health.
- Keeping up or improving fitness levels.
- Improving digestion.
- Stimulating endorphins (hormones responsible for feelings of well-being).
- Enjoying the activity.
- Keeping one's mind off negative thoughts.
- Engaging with others socially.

Tai chi, qi gong and yoga are popular with many cancer patients. Hospitals or support groups often run classes for people with cancer. Other newer techniques, such as Pilates, Feldenkrais or the Alexander Technique allow people to subtly improve core strength, mobility and flexibility, resulting in less pain and increased well-being.

**Benefits:** Tai chi, qi gong and yoga all concentrate on combining concentrated breathing with gentle movements. Breath work allows people to draw more oxygen into their body systems. This helps people feel calmer and less fatigued, as well as improving circulation and nourishing body tissue.

Meditation and visualisation are often a part of these therapies, which add to the calming benefits of the breath work and can help some people with emotional issues. Movements encourage flexibility, agility, balance and muscle tone, all of which can be impaired by inactivity. Bone density loss may also be reduced, while people with lymphoedema may also benefit.

**What to expect:** If you are unfamiliar with an exercise technique, it is best to join a class so that you can learn how to do the movements correctly, safely and within the limits of your body's ability. You can also receive guidance from the teacher, be motivated by others in the class and benefit from social interaction with others.

**Side effects:** If exercises are done correctly and within your limits, side effects should not be an issue.

**Other considerations:**

- If you have not undertaken physical activity for some time, or if you have musculoskeletal injuries, osteoporosis or lymphoedema, discuss your needs and ability with your oncologist or GP and your teacher, before starting classes.
- Ensure you don't overdo it. Join a beginner class and be aware of how you are feeling throughout it. Take care when stretching and holding poses so that you don't strain your body. Warming up and cooling down help to minimise soreness and stiffness afterwards.

"One of my clients with cancer had surgery to his upper chest. The scar tissue, his physical pain and his low self-esteem made him hunch his shoulders and close his chest in. Through Feldenkrais, he learnt how he could release the tension in his body and open his chest out without causing himself pain."

*Margaret (Feldenkrais practitioner)*

Cancer Council WA (Life Now) and SolarisCare (Chemo Club), offer a range of exercise programs for patients undergoing treatment and recovering from cancer. The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 can provide you with information about these programs as well as an information booklet about exercise and cancer.

# Yoga

Yoga is a series of movements and poses that are directed towards strengthening the body, slowing and deepening the breath and focusing the mind. Originally a part of ayurvedic medicine, yoga has gained popularity as a standalone exercise technique around the world, which benefits both physical and emotional health. There are many types of yoga - some are vigorous, such as Ashtanga yoga; some are much gentler, such as Hatha yoga.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. You may be asked to remove your shoes before entering the yoga room. You will work on a yoga mat - check that mats are available in class.

While all classes are different, a typical routine is to spend time focusing on stilling the mind and working with breath. This is followed by warm-up stretches. The main part of the session is performing different yoga postures, which have names reflecting their appearance (e.g. 'warrior' or 'cobra'). Cooling down and relaxation brings the class to a close.

A class typically lasts from one to two hours. If you are new to yoga, it is recommended that you start with a shorter beginner class.

**Evidence:** Clinical research has shown that yoga may improve sleep, decrease stress and enhance quality of life. The focus on breathing may also help reduce pain.

Cancer Council WA offers free yoga classes for cancer patients in some areas. The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 can provide you with a Yoga Information Sheet. Books, DVDs and videos are useful if you do not have access to a class or you want to practise at home.

## Tai chi

Tai chi is a part of traditional Chinese medicine that combines movement, breath work and meditation. Movements create stability in the body reflecting an ancient Chinese concept of balance known as 'yin' and 'yang'. Breath work is calming and meditative, while holding the poses helps strengthen the muscles.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. If your class is inside, you will probably do tai chi in bare feet and there may be serene music playing.

The class usually starts with simple warm-up exercises. You will then be shown different moves and given assistance in performing them. The instructor may give the poses names to help you remember them, e.g. 'white crane raises its wings'. The movements are simple to start with, and then become progressively harder, with many parts of the body needing to move to achieve the pose. Classes end with cooling down and relaxation.

**Evidence:** Studies have shown that tai chi improves balance, agility, flexibility, muscle tone and bone density. It may also help reduce stress and blood pressure.

"Tai chi gets all my senses stimulated with the music, my imagination, the colours in the room and the calm feeling it brings. It's good for gently stretching my muscles without feeling any stress and while I'm concentrating on doing the movements, my mind is clear of all other worries."

*Sue (carer)*

The exercise techniques in this chapter have a strong mind-body connection too, so they benefit both physical and emotional health.

## Qi gong

Qi gong - pronounced 'chee goong' - is also practised in traditional Chinese medicine. 'Qi' means one's life energy and 'gong' means work referring to the skill of keeping one's energy in balance. It combines sequences of slow movements with breathing, self-massage and meditation. Movements are designed to keep the flow of energy running through the body's meridians (energy channels). This can help people feel more tranquil, as well as improving both mental and physical vitality.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. Participants start with warm-up exercises to loosen the body. The instructor then guides you through a series of slow movements, which can range from very simple to complex. The exercises, which are usually very calming, help you become more aware of your energy. You might also do some meditation while you are lying, sitting, standing or walking.

**Evidence:** Clinical trials suggest that qi gong improves the well-being and quality of life of people with cancer because it helps to reduce pain and anxiety. It also helps to gently improve general fitness and fatigue and reduce inflammation.

"Qi gong was very calming and made me more self-aware: I was more aware of the energy in my body. For me it was part of managing the whole of my physical, psychological and spiritual needs. I found it easier to learn than tai chi so I was able to do it at home as well as going to classes.

*Jann (breast cancer and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma)*

## Other active exercise techniques

There are other practitioner-led techniques that you might like to explore. Although studies with cancer patients are limited, they are generally accepted as being beneficial for improving breathing, strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general well-being.

- Alexander technique: This approach to balance and well-being in mind and body helps people learn how to think about the way they move and hold themselves. By changing the way they use their body, people can enhance their mental and physical functioning on many levels.
- Feldenkrais: This method helps people become more aware of the way they move and how this contributes to or compensates for bad posture, pain and mobility restrictions. By gently retraining the mind and body to be open to new possibilities in movement, people find ways to become freer and more comfortable.
- Pilates: A program that encourages the mind to be aware of its control over one's muscles. Using awareness of one's breath and posture, the method helps to strengthen core muscles and correct postural habits that have contributed to pain, reduced mobility and poor concentration.

Dragon boat racing is popular with women who have had breast cancer. It helps to keep lymphoedema at bay, improves fitness and can be a good social network.

See [www.dragonsabreast.com.au](http://www.dragonsabreast.com.au)

# Biological-based therapies

Biological-based therapies involve the use of food, medicines and supplements with the aim of improving the way the body functions. Remedies are usually ingested (taken internally), but sometimes they can be applied directly to the skin.

Although there are hundreds of individual remedies - some of which are wrongly promoted as cancer cures, such as shark cartilage or laetrile - this section only examines the broad therapies of nutrition and herbal medicine and their role as complementary therapies.

Food, nutritional supplements and herbal medicines contain vitamins, minerals and other compounds that cause biochemical reactions (chemical changes in the body) when consumed. For example, calcium is carried to the bones and vitamin C is used in tissue repair. By providing the body with extra nourishment, it can function better.

As well as targeting specific symptoms of lowered vitality, such as stress, fatigue and infections, the use of nutrition or herbal medicine may also help to reduce certain types of pain, insomnia, nausea, digestive disturbances and other effects of cancer and its treatment. Certain herbs and nutritional supplements may also help during recovery by increasing strength and energy.

**Benefits:** Many scientific studies have been conducted on the effects of a number of herbs and nutrients for people with cancer. Some remedies have been proven to reduce side effects from cancer, as well as helping with cancer prevention. Other remedies don't have scientific backing, but historical usage suggests they may help with wound care, skin conditions, the immune system, digestive function and energy levels.

**What to expect:** In a consultation you will discuss your case history and lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise and health risks with your practitioner. You may also talk about any emotional factors affecting your health.

It will be helpful if you show your practitioner results from your blood tests and any other conventional tests you have had. The practitioner might also do some physical examinations, for example, looking at your skin and tongue, or taking your blood pressure and pulse. This will assist the practitioner in assessing what areas of the body would benefit from nutritional or herbal support. The practitioner will then suggest dietary changes and/or remedies.

**Side effects:** Side effects from biological-based complementary therapies may occur in some people. To minimise this risk, it is important to discuss your use of herbs or nutritional supplements and conventional medicine with both your complementary therapists and your doctors.

Some rare side effects include liver damage (which can be severe), other gastrointestinal discomfort, dizziness or headaches. Side effects may occur because of individual sensitivities to a particular ingredient or the strength of the preparation. Usually these side effects resolve quickly when the remedy is stopped or the dose is reduced.

Occasionally side effects can occur when certain herbs or nutritional supplements interact with conventional medications. Sometimes the effect a herb or supplement has in the body can be unwanted or dangerous. See page 71 for more information.

If you experience an unwanted effect from any biological-based therapy, you should stop taking the remedy and contact your practitioner and/or doctor for advice.

Biological-based therapies may also be called ingestive therapies or natural medicines.

If you have a serious reaction, call the ambulance or go to the emergency department of your local hospital. Take the remedy and your other medications to hospital to help doctors determine the cause of the reaction.

### **Other considerations:**

- Make sure you understand how to prepare and take your herbs and supplements. Like conventional medicine, taking the correct dose at the right time is important for the remedies to work effectively and safely.
- Sometimes the taste of herbs and supplements is off-putting. Ask the practitioner for ways to mask the taste if this is a problem for you.
- Even if you are interested in taking just one or two herbs or supplements, it is important to see a qualified practitioner rather than self-prescribing with over-the-counter products from a health food shop, pharmacy or the Internet. See page 63 for more information.
- See also the section important safety information about medicines from pages 69 to 71.

## **Confused about your medicines?**

It is important to let someone know if you are confused or concerned about any of the medicines or supplements you are taking.

As well as talking to your doctor and complementary health practitioner, you can call the National Prescribing Service Medicines Line on 1300 888 763 from 9am to 6pm EST. Pharmacists who provide confidential, independent information about prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines, staff this service.

If you suspect you have had an adverse reaction to any kind of medicine, you can report it to the Consumer Adverse Medication Events Line on 1300 134 237 Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm EST.

## Naturopathic nutrition

Optimal nutrition is the foundation of life. You need to consume a certain amount of kilojoules or calories (energy units) based on your body size, age, ethnic background and the amount of energy you use during the day. These kilojoules/calories need to be made up of a balanced amount of fats, proteins and carbohydrates, which all have important roles in the body.

You also need vitamins, minerals and other compounds found in fresh food for your body to function efficiently, give you energy and carry out the thousands of reactions occurring every day in your body. If you are deficient in certain nutrients, you may experience worse side effects from cancer treatment, be prone to other illnesses and need a longer recovery time.

**What to expect:** A naturopathic nutritionist works in a similar way to a naturopath, but a treatment plan is heavily focused on dietary changes rather than medicinal or bodywork interventions. Your practitioner may undertake some diagnostic tests, such as kinesiology (muscle testing), to gain a better understanding of your body and the way it works. They will then create a nourishing, balanced, enjoyable diet that is specifically tailored to meet the current nutritional needs of your individual body.

As well as making suggestions for changes to the things you eat and drink, your naturopathic nutritionist may recommend certain supplements to help you overcome nutritional deficiencies more easily and to aid your digestion and absorption of nutrients.

**Evidence:** There is much clinical evidence to support the adoption of a healthy diet to help in cancer prevention and recovery. However, there is no evidence that any particular diet or nutritional supplement will cure cancer.

Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for free copies of Nutrition for people with cancer.

## Differences between dietitians and nutritionists

**Dietitians:** In order to be accredited dietitians have university qualifications in science, nutrition and dietetics. They often work within a conventional medical framework in hospitals, aged care facilities and medical practices. Dietitians are trained to provide advice based on scientific evidence. They have clinical training in modifying diets to help treat disease conditions and to get the most out of food without the unnecessary use of supplements.

For cancer patients, a dietitian works out specialised diets, helps with weight issues and makes sure you are adequately nourished if you have eating difficulties. You may be given supplements if you are unable to meet your nutritional requirements through diet alone.

You might see a dietitian when you go to hospital, or privately after your treatment. If your doctor refers you to a dietitian as part of your Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) plan, you are eligible for a Medicare rebate.

**Nutritionists:** The term 'nutritionist' can refer to both qualified nutrition scientists and naturopathic nutritionists. Some dietitians also call themselves nutritionists. Nutritionists working in the natural health industry should have at least a diploma of nutrition, or equivalent, from a naturopathic college or university.

Nutritionists working within a naturopathic framework are usually employed in private practice or in a holistic medical or complementary therapies centre. Practitioners will approach dietary issues differently according to their level of training and qualifications. See pages 63 to 64 for more information.

## Western herbal medicine

Herbs are used to help the body work more efficiently, overcome symptoms and improve vitality. A practitioner makes up a blend of herbs that are specific to an individual's case. The herbs used are primarily native to Europe, but some may originate from Asia. They may be prescribed as infusions (teas), tablets or creams, or in a concentrated liquid extract form, which is diluted with water.

**What to expect:** The practitioner will ask questions to help put together a holistic picture of the state of your body's health. They will look for underlying reasons for your ill health or the symptoms you are experiencing and then will tailor a remedy that addresses both the causes of illness and the symptoms.

**Evidence:** Clinical studies on certain herbs have shown that they may be beneficial in treating conditions such as anxiety, pain, depression, nausea and digestive disorders in the general population. However, because of the unknown risks of using herbs at the same time as treatment for cancer, few clinical studies have been conducted for cancer patients with these same conditions. Anecdotal evidence suggests herbs increase vitality after conventional treatment.

### Do herbs cure cancer?

While some herbs have shown promising results for cancer prevention and care, there is currently no scientific evidence to prove that herbal remedies themselves can cure cancer. However, a number of compounds extracted from plants, such as vincristine from the periwinkle plant and taxanes from the yew tree have been found to have anti-cancer activity. These compounds are now synthesised in laboratories and used as chemotherapy drugs.

## Chinese herbal medicine

The use of Chinese herbs is a key part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Practitioners assess a person's condition based on a holistic view, including the balance of yin and yang, the status of qi and blood flow and the physiological functions of the five internal organs (heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys), which are represented by fire, wood, earth, metal and water, respectively.

Chinese herbalists select a combination of Chinese herbs to make their own formula or they can dispense pre-packaged herbal medicines that usually contain several ingredients. The aim of these medicines is to unblock meridians, bring harmony between yin and yang and restore organ function.

See page 22 for more information on TCM, meridians and qi.

**What to expect:** The practitioner will take a detailed case history and may use tongue or pulse analysis to assess how your body is out of balance. They will choose a combination of herbs and foods that will help nourish your body to bring it back into balance. Herbs may be dispensed as tablets or as a blend of loose teas that you will need to prepare in a particular way (usually boiling) before drinking.

**Evidence:** Like Western herbal medicine, many Chinese herbs for use in the general population have been scientifically evaluated with positive results. Clinical trials in China have also shown that integrating Chinese herbal medicine and conventional cancer therapy can reduce the rate of the cancer spreading or recurring. Evidence also suggests that some patients with cancer benefit from Chinese herbs through improved blood counts, less fatigue and fewer side effects from chemotherapy.

"At the start of my chemotherapy I got bad mouth ulcers. My Chinese herbalist said I needed my herbs and acupuncture changed from hot to cold, to have remedies that cooled the body rather than heating it. After that, I didn't have another mouth ulcer for three years. My chemotherapy dose was also reduced, but I think the Chinese medicine made a difference too."

*Esther (breast cancer)*

## Important safety information about medicines

### Regulation of medicinal products

In Australia, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is responsible for the safety and regulation of all therapeutic goods (medicinal products) sold here, including herbal and nutritional supplements, flower remedies and homoeopathic remedies.

Whether manufactured in Australia or overseas, all therapeutic goods must be assessed by TGA before they are sold in Australia. Approved goods have a code starting with Aust L or Aust R on the label. Most herbal and nutritional products will have an Aust L code. This means the products are assessed for their safety and quality, but not for their effectiveness.

Although there are many variables influencing the quality of products made with natural ingredients - such as country of origin, soil and environment quality, time of harvest, storage, transport and manufacturing processes - TGA's work helps to safeguard the public.

However, TGA classifies raw or loose herbs such as foods, so these are not as closely scrutinised as manufactured products. When raw herbs are imported into Australia, they are routinely inspected by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) to verify the identity of what is being brought in and to assess its quality.

If you obtain products from overseas, for example, on the Internet or from a friend, their safety, quality and efficacy cannot be guaranteed by TGA or AQIS.

For further information on product safety, labelling and regulation see [www.tga.gov.au](http://www.tga.gov.au) or [www.aqis.gov.au](http://www.aqis.gov.au).

## Labelling of tailor-made remedies

Remedies specially made up for you and dispensed by a complementary therapist will not have an Aust L or Aust R code. However, they should have a label with your name, a batch number, the date, the quantity, the dosage, directions, safety information if applicable and your practitioner's contact details.

These types of remedies are known as extemporaneous preparations, which means they have been freshly compounded for an individual and are not available as a retail product.

## Interactions

Some herbs and supplements can interact negatively with other medications or they may not be suitable to take during treatment for cancer. Make sure your doctors and complementary health practitioners are kept in the loop about your conventional and complementary treatments to reduce the chance of problems occurring:

- St. John's Wort, which is a popular herb for depression, may stop some chemotherapy drugs and other medications from working properly.
- Black cohosh is often prescribed by herbalists as a natural alternative to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for women experiencing symptoms of early menopause. The herb has been linked to liver problems, although this is rare.

- Some herbs, such as ginkgo, biloba and garlic have a blood-thinning effect, which can cause bleeding. This could be harmful for people with low platelet levels or who are scheduled for surgery.
- Vitamins may have a strong effect on your body. For example, high doses of vitamin C may affect how chemotherapy and radiation work. Beta-carotene supplements can increase lung cancer risk in smokers. Too much of any vitamin is not safe.

### **If it's natural, is it safe?**

Many people believe that because herbal remedies are derived from plants they are safe. This is not always the case. Many plants are poisonous and, herbs - if taken in the wrong dosage or in the wrong combination - can sometimes cause bad effects. Just because a product is considered natural does not mean it's always safe.

## Other therapies

Homoeopathic and flower essence remedies are not the same, but they are made in a similar way. The main (active) ingredient is diluted repeatedly so that the final remedy no longer contains any of the original ingredients.

Because there are no measurable active ingredients left in the remedies, scientists are unsure how these remedies can have any effect on the body. However, because there aren't any active ingredients in the remedies, this means that they are generally considered safe to use with conventional treatments, as they do not appear to interact with drugs.

**Benefits:** Homoeopathy and flower essences work by balancing the mind and body and by addressing emotional or spiritual needs. This positively affects the biochemical (internal) functioning of the body. They are used to treat symptoms of emotional distress, such as anxiety, insomnia, irritability or depression, as well as common ailments.

**Evidence:** Homoeopathy and flower essences are not scientifically validated therapies, but anecdotal evidence suggests that many people benefit from them. They are particularly popular in England, where the flower essences originated and where there are homoeopathic hospitals.

**Side effects:** Homoeopathic and flower remedies do not tend to cause side effects because they are extremely diluted. However, if you feel that you have experienced a reaction because of them, you should stop taking the remedy and follow the same procedures as for a reaction to herbs or supplements (see page 61).

Although homoeopathy and flower essences are taken internally, sometimes they are called energy therapies, vibrational therapies or mind-body therapies.

## Flower remedies

Also known as flower essences, these help to balance the mind, body and spirit, so that your emotional state is healthier and you are more able to cope with the challenges of everyday living, which sometimes can contribute to poor health. The remedies clear negative emotional blocks, helping to bring you peace of mind and increased well-being.

There are many types of flower remedies from around the world. The most well-known ones in Australia are the original Bach Flower Essences, which were developed in the 1930s in England and the Australian Bush Flower Essences, developed in Australia in the 1980s.

**What to expect:** Much like a counselling session, the therapist will ask questions and listen to you talk about yourself, the problems you are experiencing and how you feel about or approach certain situations. This enables the therapist to prepare a remedy - usually a blend of essences - tailored specifically for you, which is taken in water several times a day.

**Evidence:** Scientific evidence does not support the use of flower remedies for treating diseases, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that they may help people with emotional issues, which may, in turn, lead to improved quality of life.

“After surgery I was so fearful that the cancer would return. My naturopath gave me Bach flower remedies for fear, shock and exhaustion. These helped me relax and I became more realistic about my situation.”

*Louise (bowel cancer)*

## Homoeopathy

This style of treatment was developed in the 1800s in Germany. It is based on the idea that 'like cures like', which is also known as the law of similars.

Remedies are chosen to restore a person's vitality so that there is more energy to overcome ill health caused by physical and emotional imbalances.

The remedy contains a minuscule amount of a substance that would produce similar symptoms in a healthy body as the symptoms you are experiencing. By introducing the remedy into a person who is unwell, it is said to stimulate the energy required to relieve the symptoms.

**What to expect:** A homoeopath takes a case history that considers not only your medical history, but also the kind of person you are and how you respond physically and emotionally to your symptoms. A remedy is chosen and prescribed as liquid drops or tablets, which are taken throughout the day.

**Evidence:** Anecdotal evidence shows that homoeopathy may help ease pain for patients with cancer and improve their physical and emotional well-being. However, currently there is insufficient scientific evidence to show that homoeopathy improves health for patients.

See page 69 for regulatory information on medicines, including flower remedies and homoeopathy.

## Catherine's story

"Just before Christmas in 2007, I felt some pain in my breast and noticed changes to my nipple, so I saw my GP. I hardly ever go to the doctors because I'm a naturopath and don't get sick very often.

I had a core biopsy, which showed a malignancy, so I was scheduled in for a lumpectomy in January. It was really hard waiting for test results and the surgery, but I had to, because everything had shut down over the holiday period.

While I was waiting, I took herbal and nutritional remedies for my general well-being. I had always had a very good diet and lifestyle, but after I was diagnosed, I took herbs that would help strengthen and support my body to deal with different aspects of surgery, such as recovering from the anaesthetic and helping my tissue heal.

After the operation, I didn't feel pain but I was really nauseous, so I took a homoeopathic remedy to quell this.

Luckily the cancer hadn't spread to my lymph nodes, but the surgeon hadn't got a clear margin, so I had to have a mastectomy in February. I had lots of pain after surgery, so I took homoeopathic remedies in the hospital for pain relief and bruising. I also had herbs for healing the scar tissue.

Although I was given the all clear with the pathology results, I was offered further treatments, but I decided to wait to see how my body recovered.

For me, becoming informed about the cancer and the different treatments, taking control of the situation by being able to choose what treatments I did and did not want and keeping positive were really important for my recovery."

# Making treatment decisions

Sometimes it is difficult to decide on the right treatment, be it conventional, complementary or alternative. You may feel that everything is happening so fast that you don't have time to think things through properly. Usually, however, there is time to consider the different treatment options. For most people, deciding whether to use complementary therapies is not usually the first decision that needs to be made.

Some people will consider complementary therapies from the outset of their diagnosis; others will not think about using them until later as part of their supportive or palliative care. If you are considering using an alternative (unproven) therapy, it is not recommended that you delay conventional treatment in favour of it.

Deciding whether to use complementary therapies and which ones you want to try is a similar process to deciding what course of conventional treatment you are going to take.

You need to make sure you understand enough about your illness, all the treatment options and potential side effects to make your own decisions. You always have the right to find out what a suggested treatment means for you and the right to accept or refuse it, whether it is a conventional, complementary or alternative treatment.

It is advisable to go to see complementary therapists who are willing to communicate with your doctors and consider the conventional treatments you are having.

## Decision-making steps

Without actually trying different therapies, it's hard to know what might benefit you the most. Everybody is individual and responds to different types of treatment. What works for one person, may not work for another.

1. Take the time to consider the treatment options and find out more about different therapies. You could:
  - Speak to your doctor and complementary therapists.
  - Discuss the issue with your family and friends.
  - Talk to other people who have experienced these treatments, for example, at a support group or through the Cancer Support Online discussion group <http://www.cancerconnections.com.au>
  - Read about therapies on recommended websites (see pages 93 to 96).
  - Borrow books on the topic from the Cancer Council or SolarisCare libraries.
  - Contact a natural therapy association to discuss different therapies and to find practitioners in your area.
  - You can also talk to the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.
2. Weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of the different types of treatments.
  - Think about the benefits different therapies may offer and what you want specifically from using complementary therapies, for example, pain relief, less anxiety or improved appetite. If you have overlapping needs, a therapist trained in multiple therapies might be best.

- Consider the possible side effects and how these might affect you or the way your conventional treatments work.
  - Consider whether you prefer to use therapies backed up by strong scientific evidence, or whether anecdotal evidence is acceptable to you.
  - Think about the costs of treatments - see page 87 for more information.
3. If you are not happy with the information you are given - or how it is given - be it from a complementary therapist, a doctor, or somebody else, discuss your concerns with your therapist or doctor, or seek a second opinion.

“Going to qualified practitioners meant that they did all the hard work to determine what supplements, herbs and treatments would be best for me.”

*Julie (breast cancer)*

## Can I help myself? Self-prescription vs seeing a professional

An important aspect of holistic health care is the idea that people benefit from taking an active role in their health. This means finding out about sensible lifestyle choices and learning how to put them into practice for one's ongoing health and well-being. It also means making choices about different therapies and learning to use simple remedies or techniques at home without the need to see a therapist.

One of the reasons some people with cancer use complementary therapies is because it gives them the opportunity to take an active role in their health. This gives them a sense of control over what is happening to them and they feel they are able to contribute to improving their well-being.

There are many ways that people can help themselves without seeking the guidance of a professional. For example, you can read about cancer and the kinds of things that may help make you feel better. You and your family members can learn some gentle massage or acupressure techniques and you can add essential oils to your bath, do meditation, or drink some herbal teas.

Sometimes well-meaning family members and friends will also try to help you by offering advice, bringing you health foods, or encouraging you to try out a new healing technique they have read about.

However, when you are going through treatment for cancer, it is important to remember that some herbs and nutritional supplements might interact with chemotherapy or other medication and bodywork - if not performed correctly - can hinder rather than help you.

You may also get overwhelmed or confused by the vast amounts of information you read and you may find that your GP or oncologist does not know enough about the different therapies you are interested in to provide the advice you are looking for.

While self-prescribing may seem cheaper from the outset, in the long run it may not be so valuable. Consider the advantages of seeing a professional complementary therapist. They should:

- Have an objective view of your case.
- Have had experience treating a range of illnesses and may have treated other people with cancer.
- Be willing to liaise with your clinicians, if necessary.
- Prepare a tailor-made treatment plan and dispense remedies based on your individual needs, if qualified to do so.

## Finding a complementary therapist

The complementary therapy industry covers many disciplines that have different origins and levels of acceptance in Australia. Some therapies have been practised around the world for thousands of years, such as herbal medicine and massage, while others have developed more recently, such as homoeopathy in the 1800s and flower remedies in the early 1900s.

Doctors, pharmacists, nurses and some other mainstream health workers require statutory (government) registration to work, but complementary therapists do not. This means that the government does not regulate the complementary therapies industry and therapists do not have to register to practise. (An exception is traditional Chinese medicine practitioners in Victoria who now have statutory registration).

It also means that there isn't a set fee for consultations or medicines and there is a wide range of educational standards across the industry. However, there are now national training standards for many therapies, including naturopathy, Western herbal medicine, homoeopathy, remedial massage, shiatsu and ayurvedic medicine.

As the complementary therapies industry is self-regulated, there are many complementary therapy groups that are represented by professional associations, which take the place of government registration boards. These associations serve the interests of both therapists and members of the public.

Contacting an association is usually a good starting point for finding a therapist because you can:

- Verify their qualifications and experience.
- Check that they have current professional indemnity insurance.
- Apply for a rebate through a private health fund if eligible.

On pages 95 to 96 is a list of some of the associations in Australia that represent complementary therapists. Cancer Council and Solaris Care does not endorse any one association over another but recommends readers use their own judgement when making enquiries.

Many people find good therapists through word of mouth or through a support group. Some registered health professionals (e.g. doctors and nurses) are also qualified in a complementary therapy such as acupuncture or massage.

Before making appointments with therapists, it's a good idea to ask some questions to see whether they will be appropriate for your needs and to check if they are experienced or comfortable working with a person who has cancer. For ideas on what to ask, see the question checklist from pages 98 to 102.

## Talking with complementary therapists

When you make an appointment with a complementary therapist, particularly a herbalist or naturopath, confirm whether they are willing to communicate with your doctors, if necessary, about your treatment. Also check whether you should bring medical information such as test results, a list of your medications or your conventional treatment plan. This will help the practitioner gain a better understanding of your case and will minimise the risk of them dispensing remedies or providing complementary treatments that might interact with your conventional medicines or treatments.

Sometimes complementary therapists will ask you to bring a letter from your oncologist or GP giving their consent for you to use that particular therapy during your conventional cancer treatment.

Many complementary therapists provide clients with a treatment plan that outlines recommended remedies and dietary or lifestyle adjustments. If the therapist just discussed the plan with you, write down the recommendations yourself and make sure you understand how and when to take your remedies before you leave the clinic.

It is also a good idea to keep a record of your consultations, including the treatments given and medicines or supplements that you have been prescribed.

## Tips for your appointments

When you talk to health professionals, sometimes it's hard to know all the questions you should ask, or it's difficult to remember the questions you had in mind. On pages 98 to 102 there is a question checklist to help you consider what questions might be useful to ask for your situation. Mark the relevant questions and write down your own queries to bring to appointments with your complementary therapist and doctors. It will also help to jot down the answers to your queries.

You may not understand all the medical and health-related words your complementary therapists and doctors use. If you do not understand something it's okay to ask for it to be explained again. The glossary on pages 103 to 118 may also be useful.

Many people also like to have a family member or friend with them at appointments, to offer support, take part in the discussions, take notes or simply listen.

## Keeping your health care providers in the loop

If you are thinking about using complementary therapies, it is very important that you discuss this with your primary health care providers (e.g. GP, nurses, specialists) so your overall cancer care can be monitored.

Studies have shown that people may not discuss their use of complementary therapies with their primary health care providers because:

- They don't think it's important.
- They forget.
- They don't have time because the consultation is short or they have other questions to ask.
- They fear disapproval.
- They don't realise their herbs or supplements are considered complementary and could interact with other medication.

Complementary therapies are growing in popularity, so primary health care providers are becoming more used to people asking questions about them and are often supportive of other measures that can enhance well-being and improve quality of life. Some doctors and nurses have also been trained in complementary therapies themselves and are able to inform you about them.

However, some doctors and nurses may not be able to advise you in this area or may not support your use of complementary therapies. It is still important to discuss the topic with them, as it allows them to consider your safety and well-being and can help you weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different treatments.

For example, your surgeon, oncologist or radiotherapist may have specific requirements, such as not using certain creams or medicines, or not having acupuncture in a particular place on the body. If you are taking herbs or nutritional supplements, informing your health care team can minimise the risk of any negative interactions.

One way to keep your doctors and nurses informed is to have your complementary therapists provide a letter that outlines the type of therapy that you are receiving and indicates that they understand your medical history and are aware of the conventional treatment that you are expecting to undertake.

Remember, it is your right to choose your own course of treatment, whether it is conventional, complementary or alternative, but it is important that your primary health care providers are kept in the loop.

## Talking with others

Once you have found out about different treatment options, you may want to discuss them with family or friends, nursing staff, the hospital social worker or chaplain, your own religious or spiritual adviser, a cancer support group, a counsellor or the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20. Talking it over can help sort out the right course of action for you.

“I was given three months to live. I was a mess but decided my lifestyle, diet, mental attitude and work needed to be modified anyhow. My ‘team’ made the difference, giving me their expertise and commitment. My Western doctors, complementary clinicians, family, friends and colleagues had lots of positive discussions with me about how they believed that I could recover.”

*Richard (renal cell carcinoma)*

## A second opinion

Just as you may want to get a second opinion from another specialist about your conventional cancer treatment, you might want to contact a few different complementary therapists to compare how they would approach your treatment.

After consulting with a complementary therapist, you may decide that you don't want to continue seeing them because you are not sure they can offer you the right supportive treatment for your individual case.

It does not matter if you change your mind or decide to see another complementary therapist. Getting a second opinion can be a valuable part of your overall decision-making process and can help you feel comfortable about the treatment - if any - you choose to have.

"I went to a naturopath who had a more alternative approach. I'd seen him before I had cancer. He strongly recommended that I didn't have lymph node surgery and that I didn't go on Tamoxifen due to its side effects. I found this too confronting, as I had already decided to go with the Western medicine approach. As I still wanted to support my recovery with complementary therapies, I went to another naturopath."

*Julie (breast cancer)*

## Costs

The standard fee for a private practitioner is around \$60 to \$100 per hour, which does not include the cost of remedies. However, consultation costs do vary, depending on the training and experience of the therapist, the length of a consultation and the location of the practice.

Naturopaths, herbalists and homoeopaths may dispense their own remedies or sell you nutritional supplements. Prices vary depending on the type of remedy, the ingredients, strength and quantity. Consider speaking to a few practitioners or ask in a health food shop to compare costs of consultations and medicines.

If you have private health insurance, check if you are eligible for a rebate on the cost of your consultation. Also ask your practitioner if their services are covered as they will need to meet certain criteria set by your health fund. Most funds do not provide a rebate on the cost of medicines.

“I saw the Chinese therapist for the nine months that I was having conventional treatment. It wasn’t cheap though. The cost of all the herbs and consultations was over \$100 a week. That’s a lot of money over nine months. But I had an insurance payout and that really helped.”

*Esther (breast cancer)*

The array of products for sale in a health food shop can be dazzling, but the shop assistants can only give you general advice. For individual recommendations, you should see a qualified complementary health practitioner.

## Taking part in a clinical trial or research

In the past, there has not been a great deal of funding for clinical trials or research into complementary therapies to find out whether they are effective. Because of the growing popularity of complementary therapies in Australia, the National Institute of Complementary Medicine (NICM) has been established to promote research in this area of health care. Some universities and hospitals are also involved in clinical trials and research. SolarisCare has an active research program into the complementary therapies they offer.

There may be opportunities through your hospital or support group for you to take part in clinical trials and research involving the use of complementary therapies.

Before deciding whether or not to join a trial, you may wish to consider and discuss the following questions with your doctor:

- What treatments are being tested and why?
- What tests are involved?
- What are the possible risks or side effects?
- How long will the trial last?
- What will I do if problems occur while I am in the trial?
- Has an independent ethics committee approved the trial?

Your doctor may also suggest that you join a clinical trial of a new conventional cancer treatment. If you do so, it is important that you check whether using complementary therapies could impact on the trial results. If you want to participate in the trial, but your use of complementary therapies would make you ineligible, discuss the pros and cons with your doctor and/or complementary therapists.

For more information about clinical trials call the Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 for a free copy of Understanding Clinical Trials:

[www.cancerwa.asn.au/patients/making-decisions-about-treatment/clinical-trials/](http://www.cancerwa.asn.au/patients/making-decisions-about-treatment/clinical-trials/)

# Seeking support

## Life after treatment

Complementary therapies, including those discussed in this booklet, may also enhance your general well-being and help you cope better with life after treatment, which can often be challenging for people, both immediately afterwards and in the future.

It takes time to get your strength back, establish your old daily routine, or adjust to a new one. You may still have to deal with physical changes in your body, or social and emotional changes that occurred during treatment. You may also be fearful of the cancer returning and wonder what you can do to prevent this.

If you have continued feelings of sadness, have trouble getting up in the morning or have lost motivation for things that previously gave you pleasure, talk to your doctor or complementary therapist.

If you have severe or ongoing depression, you may be clinically depressed and should see your doctor who can prescribe conventional medication or refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist.

## Caring for someone with cancer

You may be reading this booklet because you are caring for someone with cancer. Being a carer can be very stressful, especially when the person you are looking after is someone you love very much. Look after yourself during this time. Give yourself some time out, consider trying some of the therapies listed in this book yourself, and share your worries and concerns with somebody neutral such as a counsellor or your doctor.

Many cancer support groups are open to carers as well as people with cancer. A support group can offer a valuable opportunity to share experiences and ways of coping.

There are support services that can help you in your caring role, such as Home Help, Meals on Wheels or visiting nurses. Organisations, such as Carers WA, can provide you with information and support. Phone 1800 242 636 to talk about your needs, or visit [www.carersaustralia.com.au](http://www.carersaustralia.com.au). Complementary therapies offered by Cancer Council WA and SolarisCare are available to carers.

Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 to find out more about different services or to obtain a free copy of the Caring for Someone with Cancer booklet.

### SolarisCare

Through its network of drop in centres, SolarisCare provides a safe place to reflect and have time out. Trained volunteers offer free complementary therapies, a 'listening ear, information services and links to other support groups. SolarisCare operates an extensive research program with the vision of promoting and supporting research into patient centred cancer care.

SolarisCare provides a large range of complementary therapies, including counselling, workshops and support. You can call SolarisCare Cancer Support Centres on (08) 9346 7630 Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm.

## Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

Cancer Council Helpline is a telephone information service provided by the Cancer Council for people affected by cancer.

For the cost of a local call, you can talk about your concerns and needs confidentially with specialised oncology health professionals. Helpline consultants can send you written information and put you in touch with appropriate services offered by the Cancer Council or within your area. You can also request information in languages other than English.

Cancer Council WA has a range of services available that you may be able to access, depending on your circumstances:

- Counselling
- Peer-support groups
- Practical and financial assistance
- Lymphoedema management
- Complementary therapies
- Exercise and relaxation programs
- Accommodation in Perth for country patients
- Wig service
- Booklets and other resources.

You can call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20, Monday to Friday, during business hours. If calling outside business hours, you can leave a message and your call will be returned the next business day.

# Cancer Information on the Internet

The Internet can be a useful source of information, although not all websites are reliable. The websites listed below are good sources of reliable information.

## Australian

Cancer Council WA

[www.cancerwa.asn.au](http://www.cancerwa.asn.au)

Cancer Council Australia

[www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)

Cancer Institute NSW

[www.cancerinstitute.org.au](http://www.cancerinstitute.org.au)

Health Insite - an Australian Government Initiative

[www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/complementary\\_and\\_alternative\\_therapies](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/complementary_and_alternative_therapies)

The National Institute of Complementary Medicine

[www.nicm.edu.au](http://www.nicm.edu.au)

Therapeutic Goods Administration

[www.tga.gov.au](http://www.tga.gov.au)

## International

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre  
[www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm](http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm)

Complementary and Alternative Medicine Evidence Online (CAMEOL) database  
[www.rccm.org.uk](http://www.rccm.org.uk)

US National Cancer Institute Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine  
<http://nccam.nih.gov/>

Complementary/Integrative Medicine Education Resources (CIMER)  
[www.manderson.org](http://www.manderson.org)

Complementary and Alternative Medicine Specialist Library  
[www.library.nhs.uk/cam/](http://www.library.nhs.uk/cam/)

Medicine Plus-Herbs and Supplements  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/herb\\_All.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/herb_All.html)

Integrative Medicine Gateway  
[www.imgateway.net/page.jsp?p\\_name=Home](http://www.imgateway.net/page.jsp?p_name=Home)

Macmillan Cancer Support  
[www.macmillan.org.uk/Home.aspx](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Home.aspx)

## Professional Associations

The following associations represent practitioners across a range of disciplines. You can find out more about the different therapies and locate a practitioner by accessing the websites or calling the associations.

Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association

[www.acupuncture.org.au](http://www.acupuncture.org.au)

1300 725 334

Australian and New Zealand Art Therapy Association

[www.anzata.org](http://www.anzata.org)

Australian Association of Massage Therapists

[www.aamt.com.au](http://www.aamt.com.au)

1300 138 872

Australian Feldenkrais Guild

[www.feldenkrais.org.au](http://www.feldenkrais.org.au)

(08) 9386 2739

Australian Homoeopathic Association

[www.homeopathyoz.org](http://www.homeopathyoz.org)

(08) 9295 6782

Australian Hypnotherapists Association

[www.ahahypnotherapy.org.au](http://www.ahahypnotherapy.org.au)

1800 067 55

Australian Music Therapy Association

[www.austmta.org.au](http://www.austmta.org.au)

Australian Natural Therapists Association

[www.anta.com.au](http://www.anta.com.au)

1800 817 577

Bowen Therapists Federation of Australia

[www.bowen.asn.au](http://www.bowen.asn.au)

1300 426 936

Psychotherapists and Counsellors Association of WA

(08) 9338 7761

Dietitians Association of Australia

[www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

(02) 6163 5200

International Aromatherapy and Aromatic Medicine Association

[www.iaama.com.au](http://www.iaama.com.au)

(02) 9715 6622

National Herbalists Association of Australia

[www.nhaa.org.au](http://www.nhaa.org.au)

(02) 8765 0071

Reflexology Association of Australia

[www.reflexology.org.au](http://www.reflexology.org.au)

1300 733 711

Reiki Australia

[www.reikiaustralia.com.au](http://www.reikiaustralia.com.au)

1300 664 780

Shiatsu Therapy Association of Australia

[www.staa.org.au](http://www.staa.org.au)

1300 138 250

Yoga Teachers Association of Australia

[www.yogateachers.asn.au](http://www.yogateachers.asn.au)

1300 881 451

## Library

Cancer Council WA Library collection includes books, videos, DVDs, CDs and a large range of current cancer medical journals.

SolarisCare also has a small library collection.

### Related publications

You might also find the following Cancer Council publications relevant:

- Emotions and Cancer
- Nutrition for people with cancer
- Cancer Myths Fact Sheet

Call the Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 for free copies of any of these booklets, or download them from our website, [www.cancerwa.asn.au](http://www.cancerwa.asn.au).

## Question checklist

It is important to ask questions about the complementary therapies you are interested in. This will help you make decisions on the kinds of complementary therapies that would be of benefit and be safe for you. Read through these questions and make a note of the ones that are relevant to you to help in your discussions with complementary therapists, doctors or other health professionals.

### Things to consider before using complementary therapies

Some questions you might ask when deciding what complementary therapies to use or whether to use them at all are:

- How does the therapy work?
- Will the therapy directly harm me because of:
  - its side effects?
  - possible interaction with other medication?
  - needing to stop conventional treatment?
  - being told by the therapist to stop or delay all conventional treatment?
- Is the cost of the therapies or medicines beyond my means?

To help you answer these questions, you need to talk to complementary therapists and doctors. Depending on their area of speciality, they may not know the answers to some of these questions and you may need to work together to find out more information.

## General questions to ask any potential complementary therapist

- What are your qualifications? Are you a member of a professional association?
- What training or experience do you have in treating people with cancer? Have you treated anyone with my type of cancer?
- Are you willing to work with my doctors or other health professionals I may need to see?
- How can the therapies you practise help me? Are there any specific precautions you would take for me?
- Are there side effects or risks associated with these therapies?
- Has the therapy been tested in clinical trials?
- Have the findings been published and are they available for me to read?
- Can these therapies be combined with conventional treatment?
- How long should I use this therapy and how will I know if it's working?
- Are you able to do home visits if I am not well enough to attend your clinic?
- How long are your consultations?
- What do you charge for a consultation?
- What can I expect from a consultation?
- Do you dispense your own medicine and supplements?
- How much can I expect to pay for medicines?
- Have the products or medicines you dispense been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration?

## General questions to ask your doctor

- Are you familiar with complementary therapies or medicines?
- Are you qualified in complementary therapies yourself?
- Are there any complementary therapies that you think might benefit me?
- Would you be happy for me to use complementary therapies?
- Would you be willing to guide me in my research or choice of complementary therapies?
- Would you be willing to talk to my complementary therapist about my case?
- Can you recommend any complementary therapists to me?
- Do you know whether the complementary medicines I am taking or wish to take will interfere with my chemotherapy or other conventional treatments?

## Questions about specific therapies

### Mind-body techniques

- What type of therapists would be the best for my issues?
- Can you refer me to a psychologist or a counsellor?
- Can you suggest other techniques that may be helpful?

## Body-based practices

- Are there any forms of massage or bodywork that would benefit me?
- Would you advise against any particular form of massage or bodywork?
- Can you provide me with a letter giving your approval for me to have massage or other bodywork therapy?
- Are there any areas on my body where the massage therapist needs to take special care? Can the area be touched or should it be avoided all together?
- Can I have acupuncture before and/or after surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy?
- What precautions, if any, should I take?
- What type of exercise would benefit me the most?
- Would I be able to participate in tai chi, qi gong or yoga?
- What level of exercise intensity would be suitable for me?

## Biological-based therapies

### Nutrition

- Are there any dietary modifications I should make for my general well-being?
- Should I eat organic foods?
- Are there any vitamin or mineral supplements that will help specific side effects caused by conventional treatment?
- Should I be taking a multivitamin?
- What can I eat to improve my digestion and bowel movements?
- Are there any foods or supplements that I should definitely have or definitely avoid during and after cancer treatment?
- Should I see a dietitian or a nutritionist?

## Herbal medicine

- Are there any herbs that you would recommend during or after cancer treatment?
- Are there any herbs that I shouldn't take because of my medication, surgery or other conventional treatments?
- If I use herbal medicine, when should I take it in relation to my other medication or conventional treatments? Is it okay to use it at the same time or should I take it at a different time?
- Can I use a herbal cream to help with redness from radiation?
- Is it okay for me to drink herbal teas as a general beverage?

## Other therapies

### Flower remedies and homoeopathy

- Do you think flower remedies or homoeopathy would benefit me?
- Is it all right for me to use these remedies at any time?
- Will I have any side effects from these remedies?

# Glossary

## **active exercise techniques**

Exercise techniques that require active participation to achieve the benefits.

## **active ingredient**

The actual compound in a medicine that gives a remedy the effects it has on the body.

## **acupressure**

An ancient technique that is similar to acupuncture but uses non-invasive pressure on specific points along the meridians in the body to unblock energy and restore health.

## **acupuncture**

A traditional form of Chinese medicine in which fine, sterile needles are inserted into points along the energy channels in the body to rebalance energy and reduce symptoms of ill health.

## **alexander technique**

A method of re-educating people to see that their physical posture is connected with the way they think and act.

## **alternative therapies**

Therapies that are used in place of conventional treatment, often in the hope that they will provide a natural cure.

## **analgesic**

A drug or natural remedy, such as a herb or essential oil, used to relieve pain.

## **anecdotal evidence**

Proof to validate something that is only based on people's individual experiences and has not been scientifically tested.

## **aromatherapy**

The use of essential oils extracted from plants to improve mood, physical symptoms and general well-being.

### **art therapy**

A form of psychotherapy in which the process of creating any kind of artwork helps people express their feelings and encourages discussion about a difficult situation such as illness. It also gives people a relaxing diversion from their worries and pain.

### **ayurvedic medicine**

Traditional medicine from India based on balancing the different organs and systems in the body by combining herbal medicine, diet, massage, yoga and meditation.

### **base oil (carrier oil)**

An oil used in massage or aromatherapy that allows the massage therapist to work over the skin easily. Base oil can be applied directly to the skin.

### **biochemical function (internal function)**

The way the body works internally. There are thousands of reactions occurring every day in cells and organs to keep people alive and functioning. Medicines including drugs, herbs and dietary supplements, affect internal functioning, just as food does.

### **biological-based therapies**

Therapies that include herbal remedies, vitamins and other dietary supplements that are taken internally and affect the biochemical functioning of the body.

### **blood counts**

The levels of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in the body. During chemotherapy, blood counts can often be low, causing problems such as anaemia, lowered immunity or bleeding.

### **body-based practices (bodywork)**

A range of different therapies that work through touch on either the external part of the body or the energy field surrounding the body.

**bowen therapy**

A non-invasive bodywork technique in which the therapist's hands touch the body lightly but with precise movements to help it re-set and rebalance itself. This promotes pain relief and inner healing.

**carbohydrate**

The part of food made of sugars and starches. A good source of energy (kilojoules/calories).

**case history**

A description of a person's medical background and current health status, which helps practitioners determine appropriate treatments.

**chemotherapy**

The use of cytotoxic drugs to treat cancer by killing cancer cells or slowing their growth.

**chinese herbal medicine**

The use of herbs originating from Asia to help strengthen vitality, overcome illness and improve patient outcomes.

**chiropractic**

Physical manipulation of the spinal nerves to overcome structural problems and reduce a number of symptoms believed to be caused by spinal nerve compression

**clinical trial**

A research study that tests new and improved treatments.

**coffee enema**

An alternative therapy in which coffee is inserted into the anus to open the bowels, cleanse the colon and remove toxins from the body. There are many risks with this therapy, such as internal burning or tearing and depletion of nutrients.

## **complementary therapies**

Supportive treatments that are used in conjunction with conventional treatment. They improve general health, well-being and quality of life and help people cope with side effects of cancer. Not all therapies have been scientifically validated, but there is growing evidence in favour of them.

## **constitution**

A term used by some complementary practitioners to describe a person's body type and personality. Constitution is based on genetics, individuality and lifestyle and helps the practitioner decide on the best kind of treatment plan.

## **contraindication**

When a medicine should not be taken or when a therapy should not be used because it could cause unwanted interactions or be dangerous.

## **conventional cancer treatment**

Commonly used, scientifically validated treatments for cancer, including surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy and pharmaceutical medications.

## **counselling**

When a person consults a professional in a confidential setting to discuss and resolve difficult issues.

## **dietetics**

The study of food, nutrition and the role different nutrients play in the body to make it work effectively. A dietitian is a health professional specialising in dietetics and human nutrition.

## **diagnosis**

The identification and naming of a person's disease.

## **dietary supplement**

Nourishment given to increase the nutritional intake of kilojoules/calories (energy), vitamins and minerals.

## **endorphin**

A hormone made in the body and released in the brain during exercise and excitement, giving people a feeling of well-being and mild pain relief.

## **energy (energy fields and meridians)**

Vital force or life force that runs within and outside of the body. Energy is believed to surround the body in an energy field, as well as running along invisible meridians inside the body.

## **energy (kilojoules or calories)**

Energy enables us to carry out our daily activities and provides fuel for all the reactions that occur in our bodies. Energy is counted in kilojoules or calories and is obtained from the food and drink we eat, i.e. fat, carbohydrates and protein.

## **energy therapies**

Therapies that work on the concept of energy or vital force surrounding or running through the body. By addressing imbalances or blockages in the flow of this energy, usually through some form of touch, well-being is enhanced.

## **essential oil**

Aromatic oil extracted from different plant parts, such as seeds, bark, flowers and leaves, for use in aromatherapy.

## **feldenkrais**

A system of movement where you are encouraged to become more self-aware in order to improve movement and posture and reduce pain through minimum effort and maximum efficiency.

## **flower remedies (flower essences)**

Natural medicines extracted from flowers and diluted several times so that no active ingredient remains. The remedies help address emotional issues that affect physical and mental health.

### **erson therapy**

A strict type of vegetarian diet therapy that promotes only pure fruit and vegetable juices and unprocessed foods to detoxify the body. There is no reliable evidence to prove its effectiveness in treating cancer.

### **guided imagery/creative visualisation**

A type of meditation in which a person is led through imagining a series of scenes that promote healing thoughts in order to achieve peace, pain relief and relaxation.

### **healing touch**

A gentle bodywork technique in which soft touch helps to restore harmony and balance by working with the flow of energy in the body.

### **herb**

A part of a plant, such as leaves, flowers, roots or berries, that is used for medicinal or culinary (cooking) purposes.

### **herbal medicine**

An ancient therapy in which herbs are taken internally or applied externally to treat and prevent illness and to strengthen the body.

### **holistic health care**

Health care that assesses both the causes and effects of disease and the way the different systems of the body impact on each other. It addresses illness with holistic treatments that benefit people's emotional, structural and internal health.

### **homoeopathy see**

A system of health care based on the law of similars that 'like cures like'. Remedies - either tablets or liquid drops - are carefully chosen to stimulate an ill person's inner vitality and to direct energy in the body to where it is needed most for healing.

### **hormone**

A substance that affects how your body works and controls growth and reproduction. Hormones are distributed around the body through the bloodstream.

**hormone treatment**

A treatment that blocks the body's natural hormones that help cancer grow.

**hypnotherapy**

A type of counselling where a practitioner induces a deep relaxation so that a patient's subconscious (inner) mind can communicate its thoughts with their conscious (aware) mind to overcome difficulties such as stress, fear and unwanted habits.

**immunotherapy**

The prevention or treatment of disease using substances that alter the immune system's response.

**indigenous medicine**

In Australia, remedies and ways of healing used traditionally by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many of these treatments are still in use today.

**infusion**

A herbal remedy made up by steeping dried herbs in hot or boiling water.

**ingestive therapy (ingested remedy)**

Therapies that are taken internally (ingested), such as herbal medicine, nutrition, flower remedies and homoeopathy.

**integrative medicine (integrative therapies)**

The use of both evidence-based complementary therapies and conventional medicine.

**interaction**

An effect that occurs when two or more substances react with each other.

**kinesiology (muscle testing)**

A therapy developed in the 1960s that tests the strength of muscles to determine the functional status of the body and whether it has any imbalances.

### **laetrile therapy**

Laetrile, also known as amygdalin or vitamin B17, is a substance derived from almond and apricot kernels, that has been promoted as a cancer cure. Studies have proved it is ineffective in treating cancer and may cause poisoning due to its high levels of cyanide.

### **life coaching**

A type of counselling in which a coach collaborates with the client to set goals and work out ways to change one's life to achieve them.

### **lifestyle factors**

Complementary practitioners will usually look at lifestyle factors to help get a holistic (well-rounded) picture of the level of your health and well-being. Factors include what you eat and drink, how much you exercise, your occupation and its risks, relationships, stress and pressures in your life, whether you smoke or how much time out you have.

### **liquid extract**

Herbal remedies in which the herb is extracted in concentrated form into a solution of water and alcohol. The extract is further diluted in water when taken.

### **lymphatic system**

A network of vessels that carry a clear fluid called lymph from the body's tissues to the bloodstream. The lymphatic system is part of the body's immune system and helps the body to fight infection.

### **lymphoedema**

Swelling in the tissues caused by a build-up of fluid, which may occur after surgery or radiotherapy to the lymph nodes.

### **macrobiotic diet**

A strict diet that works on the principles of balancing yin and yang in the body. It discourages meat and processed foods, while fruit, vegetables and grains should be eaten in season and thoroughly chewed. There is no evidence that eating a macrobiotic diet will cure cancer and there is some concern that it does not provide enough nourishment.

### **magnet therapy**

The use of magnets over affected areas of the body to reduce pain, improve mobility and to overcome disease. There is no scientific evidence that this works.

### **manual lymphatic drainage**

A type of specialised massage in which bodyworkers help to reduce the swelling caused by lymphoedema by manually stimulating the flow of lymph.

### **massage**

A type of bodywork therapy in which muscles are stimulated, stretched and relaxed through specialised pressure and strokes. Massage can be soothing to the entire body.

### **meditation**

A technique to relax the mind and body by focusing on breathing, learning to still the mind and thinking only about the present. Meditation is used in a number of religions, but can be practised without a religious context for the purpose of relieving stress, tension and pain, and to help clarify thoughts and feelings.

### **melatonin**

A naturally occurring hormone that helps to regulate the body clock. It is also a strong antioxidant. Some studies have suggested it is beneficial in preventing cancer and its growth but it is not specifically prescribed as an anti-cancer agent.

### **meridian**

In traditional Chinese medicine, the body is believed to have meridians, or energy channels, through which energy flows to keep people balanced and healthy.

### **microwave therapy**

An alternative therapy using microwaves to treat cancer. In 2005 the National Health and Medical Research Council found that there was no scientific evidence to support the use of microwaves in curing cancer, either alone or when combined with other therapies.

### **mind-body techniques**

Techniques that help people address emotional issues and other problems that have a mental component, such as anxiety, depression, stress and pain. This can help people cope better with side effects and physical ailments.

### **minerals**

Components of food that are essential for the body, such as iron, zinc and calcium.

### **mistletoe extract**

An alternative therapy made from the European mistletoe plant to treat cancer. There is some evidence that it may improve quality of life but no evidence to support its use as a cancer cure.

### **multifactorial**

Involving many factors or reasons.

### **music therapy**

A mind-body technique that improves people's health and well-being by allowing them to be diverted from their pain and anxiety and enabling them to express themselves through the use of music.

### **natural therapies**

A broad range of therapies that don't rely on the use of drugs.

### **naturopathic nutrition**

A form of nutrition that is based on naturopathic principles of healthy eating. Not only are specific foods chosen to create a balanced diet, but emphasis is placed on correcting problems in the digestive system to enhance digestion and absorption of nutrients.

**naturopathy**

A holistic system of health care that utilises diet, bodywork and natural medicinal remedies to strengthen inner vitality to overcome disease and maintain health.

**needles (press needles)**

Fine, sterile needles that are inserted into the body during acupuncture. Press needles are like studs, which are covered with tape to help them stay in place for several days.

**non-conventional (unconventional) therapies**

Another term for complementary or alternative therapies.

**nutrition**

The process of eating and digesting the food the body needs.

**oncologist**

A doctor who specialises in the study and treatment of cancer.

**osteopathy**

Manipulation of the musculoskeletal system (muscle, bones and joints) to reduce pain and improve mobility and posture.

**ozone therapy**

An alternative therapy in which oxygen is targeted at cancer cells in the belief that they will die in its presence. Although this treatment is promoted as a cancer cure, there is no scientific evidence to support the therapy and therefore it is not recommended.

**palliative care**

Multidisciplinary care of people who have a life-limiting illness. It aims to improve quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, spiritual, social and practical needs. It is not just for end-of-life care, but is equally important at any stage of advanced cancer.

### **palliative treatment**

Medical treatment for people with advanced cancer to help them manage pain and other physical and emotional symptoms of cancer.

### **passive bodywork techniques**

Body-based therapies such as massage and reflexology where the therapist applies manual pressure to the client's body or works on the energy fields of the client.

### **pilates**

A program of exercise that encourages the mind to be aware of its control over the muscles in the body to improve breathing, core strength and posture.

### **placebo**

A harmless substitute for a medicine or treatment.

### **primary cancer**

The original cancer. Cells from the primary cancer may break away and be carried to other parts of the body, where secondary cancers may form.

### **professional indemnity insurance**

Liability insurance that service providers, including complementary therapists, should have in the event a patient or third party claims that they are professionally negligent. Most complementary therapy associations and private health funds require therapists on their lists to have professional indemnity insurance.

### **psychological techniques**

Another term for mind-body techniques.

### **psychotherapy**

A range of techniques that help people improve their mental health and well-being by giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts and consider how their behaviour and feelings impact on their day-to-day life.

### **pulse analysis**

A form of diagnosis used in traditional Chinese medicine where a person's pulses are felt - usually on the wrists - to determine the imbalances in their body.

### **qi**

Pronounced 'chee', this is another term for energy or vital force.

### **qi gong**

Pronounced 'chee goong', this is a gentle exercise and relaxation technique from traditional Chinese medicine that combines slow movements, breathing, self massage and meditation to rebalance and realign the body.

### **radiotherapy**

The use of radiation, usually x-rays, to kill cancer cells or injure them so they cannot grow and multiply.

### **reflexology**

A type of bodywork where the practitioner massages zones on the feet or hands that relate to different parts of the body. By pressing on reflex points, energy meridians are unblocked.

### **reiki**

This bodywork therapy means 'universal life energy' and is a system of light or no touch movements that turns blocked negative energy into positive energy.

### **relaxation (relaxation techniques)**

Any technique that encourages relaxation in order to reduce stress and the physical problems it causes.

### **scientific evidence**

Rigorous testing to prove something works or does not work. Clinical trials are a form of scientific evidence.

### **shark cartilage**

Shark cartilage is promoted as an alternative therapy for cancer because of the belief that it stops angiogenesis (the growth of new blood vessels that nourish the tumour). Several studies have shown that this therapy is not effective.

**shiatsu**

A type of bodywork in which the pressure points are massaged lightly with the fingers, thumb, elbows, knees, hands and feet to restore vitality.

**side effect**

Unintended effects of a drug, herb or other treatment.

**spirituality**

Connection with a higher being or one's inner self, which often brings comfort and understanding about the world, one's place in it and the reasons behind life's challenges.

**supportive care**

Care that extends beyond treating the actual cancer. It covers wider issues that occur due to cancer and includes counselling, practical assistance, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and spiritual care. Complementary health care is a type of supportive care.

**tai chi**

An active exercise technique in traditional Chinese medicine that incorporates movement, breathing techniques and meditation to create stability in the body.

**therapeutic touch**

A bodywork technique where soothing touch by the practitioner calms the body through restoration of the flow of energy.

**tongue analysis**

A diagnostic technique used in traditional Chinese medicine in which the tongue's colour, shape, coating and texture are examined to find out about the state of a person's health.

**traditional chinese medicine (TCM)**

A broad system of holistic health care originating in Asia, which includes treatments such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, qi gong and tai chi.

**traditional medicine (traditional therapies)**

A term used by complementary therapists to mean old systems of medicine that are passed down through the ages, such as herbal medicine. Medical practitioners may use the term to mean mainstream (orthodox or regular) medicine that is practised in hospitals today.

**vaporiser (oil burner)**

A vessel in which essential oils are placed above a flame or other heat source to release the aroma.

**visualisation**

Another term for guided imagery.

**vital force (vital energy)**

The life force within the body that contributes to people's health and well-being. It is stimulated by nourishing foods or medicines, mind-body interventions and the use of touch therapies.

**vitamins**

Essential substances found in food, which the body needs in order to burn energy, repair tissue, assist metabolism and fight infection.

**western herbal medicine**

The use of herbs - mainly from Europe - to correct imbalances in the body and bring it back into a state of health. Herbalists prepare individual blends of herbs that address a range of symptoms.

**yin and yang**

An ancient Asian concept of balance used in traditional Chinese medicine. It is believed that everything is made up of opposites that complement each other. Yin represents coolness, gentleness and darkness; yang represents heat, strength and light.

**yoga**

An active exercise technique originating from India that focuses on breathing, stretching, strengthening and relaxation. Yoga can be done at a gentle pace or very vigorously.

## How you can help

At Cancer Council WA we're dedicated to defeating cancer. As well as funding more cancer research than any other charity in the state, we advocate for the highest quality of care for cancer patients and their families, and create cancer-smart communities by empowering people with knowledge about cancer, its prevention and early detection. We also offer direct financial assistance for those people in hardship as a result of having cancer. These achievements would not be possible without community support, great and small.

**Join a Cancer Council event:** join one of our community fundraising events like Daffodil Day, Australia's Biggest Morning Tea, Relay For Life, Girls Night In and Pink Ribbon Day, or hold your own fundraiser or become a volunteer.

**Make a donation:** any donation, whether large or small, will make a meaningful contribution to our fight to defeat cancer.

**Buy your sun protection products from our website or our retail stores:** every purchase helps you prevent cancer and contributes financially to our work.

**Help us speak out and create a cancer-smart community:** Cancer Council is a leading advocate for cancer prevention and improved patient services. You can help us speak out on important cancer issues and help us defeat cancer by living and promoting a cancer-smart lifestyle.

To find out more about how you or your family and friends can help, please call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

## Rural Services

Cancer Council Western Australia provides two services in its rural communities :

- Support and information services for cancer patients and their families provided by our Cancer Support Co-ordinators.
- Education services to raise awareness about prevention and early intervention of cancer provided by our Regional Education Officers.

Area	Education Services	Support and Information Services
Kimberley -Broome	(08) 9192 1665	(08) 9192 5899
Pilbara - Karratha	(08) 9143 1316	-
Mid West - Geraldton	(08) 9956 2406	(08) 9956 2408
Goldfields - Kalgoorlie	(08) 9021 7650	(08) 9080 8200
Goldfields - Esperance	-	(08) 9071 0400
Wheatbelt - Northam	-	(08) 9690 1603
Midland - Guildford	(08) 9274 4370	(08) 6278 1048
Peel - Rockingham	-	(08) 9581 4059
South West - Bunbury	(08) 9781 2362	(08) 9791 1464
South West - Busselton	-	(08) 9751 2762
Great Southern - Albany	(08) 9842 7513	(08) 9842 7536

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- Complementary therapies are generally used in conjunction with conventional cancer treatment.
- Sometimes called natural therapies, they may offer physical, emotional and spiritual support, reduced side effects from medical treatment, and improved quality of life.
- Finding out about non-conventional therapies can assist you to make decisions about your overall treatment plan for cancer.

## For further information contact:



Statewide for the cost of a local call  
Weekdays 8am - 6pm

### **Cancer Council Western Australia**

*A non-government, community supported organisation*

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