



## The ABCs of Complementary and Alternative Therapies and Cancer Treatment

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# The ABCs of Complementary and Alternative Therapies and Cancer Treatment

by Katen Moore, M.S.N., R.N., N.P.-C., AOCN,<sup>®</sup> and Libby Schmais, M.F.A., M.L.S.

*acupuncture*

- antineoplaston therapy*
- applied kinesiology*
- aromatherapy*
- art therapy*
- ayurveda*
- Bach flower remedies*
- bioenergetics*
- biofeedback*
- cell therapy*
- chelation therapy*
- colon therapy*
- crystals*
- dance therapy*
- electromagnetic therapy*
- enzyme therapy*
- faith healing*
- feng shui*
- Gerson therapy*
- heat therapy*
- herbal remedies*
- holistic medicine*
- homeopathic healing*
- humor therapy*
- hydrogen peroxide therapy*
- hydrotherapy*
- imagery*
- juicing*
- light therapy*
- magnet therapy*
- massage*
- meditation*
- metabolic therapy*
- music therapy*
- Native American healing*
- naturopathic medicine*
- neural therapy*
- osteopathy*
- oxygen therapy*
- polarity therapy*
- qi gong*
- reflexology*
- shamanism*
- tai chi*
- therapeutic touch*
- yoga*
- ...and more*

**F**ollowing is a brief overview of the complementary therapies that we have found most commonly requested by cancer patients and used in the management of symptoms of cancer treatment. These are not meant as a recommendation. If a particular therapy appeals to your patient, encourage him or her to talk with you. Learn what the patient expects from the complementary therapy. In all cases, recommend that your patient always consider safety issues. Discuss the risk of possible interactions between medications, whether conventional or complementary. Most importantly, educate yourself about these traditions and therapies, and develop professional relationships with practitioners of them who can work together with you and your patients.

**ACUPUNCTURE**

In the ancient Chinese healing discipline of acupuncture, thin needles are inserted at specific locations throughout the body along invisible channels called meridians. The needles are usually kept in place for less than one-half hour. Acupuncture can be quite effective for

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nausea, pain, or stress relief. Acupuncture has few side effects and is usually low in cost. Contact the American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine at [www.aaom.org](http://www.aaom.org).

*Safety.* The acupuncturist must be properly licensed and needs to know the cancer diagnosis and identified tumor sites before treatment, as needles should not be placed in tumor sites. Acupuncture is inappropriate for neutropenic or thrombocytopenic patients, those who have recently started anticoagulation therapy, or those with active infection. Needles should be single use only. Acupuncture should be avoided while the patient is on radiation treatment and for two days before and after chemotherapy treatment.

**AROMATHERAPY**

With aromatherapy, essential oils are distilled or cold pressed from plants and used to treat a variety of symptoms and conditions, such as anxiety, insomnia, nausea, pain, and some skin conditions. Specific healing properties are attributed to each essential oil. Most practitioners recommend administration of only a few drops at a time, as a bath infusion, during massage, or via diffuser. Always dilute an essential oil before applying to the skin. Contact the American Aromatherapy Association at [www.aromaweb.com](http://www.aromaweb.com).

*Safety.* Essential oils are not intended for internal use. Patients with skin allergies or asthma may want to avoid aromatherapy oils altogether. An essential oil should contain a single pure essence. Perfumed candles and bath oils are enjoyable, but they may contain impurities that interfere with their aroma-therapeutic value. Although there is no scientific evidence that aromatherapy is effective in pre-

venting or treating cancer, it can be used to enhance quality of life.

### **BACH FLOWER REMEDIES**

Dr. Edward Bach (1886-1936) developed 38 remedies to treat such emotional problems as despair or lack of confidence. Essences of flowers are diluted and preserved in brandy, which are then again diluted with water. The usual dose of a Bach Flower Remedy is a few drops taken either sublingually or mixed with a quarter cup of water and swallowed. Although the flower essences are extremely dilute, the "vibrational and therapeutic" essence remains, according to Bach's theory. For Bach flower remedies, visit [www.bachcentre.com](http://www.bachcentre.com).

*Safety.* Patients who cannot have products containing alcohol or fermentation may want to avoid these remedies.

### **HERBAL REMEDIES**

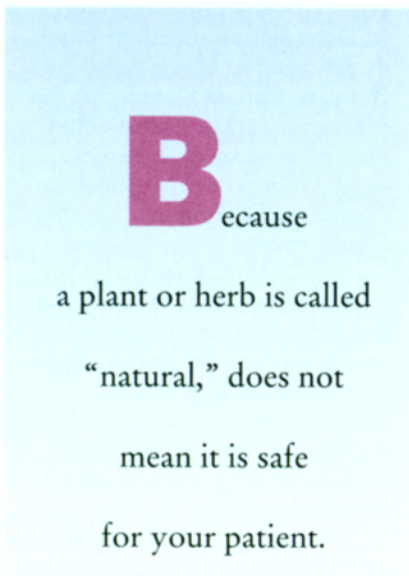
Many traditional healers have used medicinal herbs and herbal preparations to treat the gamut of symptoms and illnesses. Ginger root, for example, can be effective for appetite stimulation and queasiness, while chamomile tea has been found to alleviate mild anxiety. Many common remedies, such as aspirin (from willow bark) and decongestants (from eucalyptus), were originally derived from what we now refer to as herbal remedies. Herbs are administered in many forms, including capsule, tablet, extract (liquid form), tea, ointment, and cream. Contact the American Botanical Council at [www.herbalgram.org](http://www.herbalgram.org).

*Safety.* Because a plant or herb is called "natural," does not mean it is safe for your patient. It is especially important when using herbal medications to read the labels carefully and make sure that only the individual herb desired is present and in the dosage required. As with all remedies, more is not better. Patients should buy herbs from a reputable manufacturer and know the correct name of the herb. As with prescription medications, there are many similarly named herbs. The wrong herb could be harmful. Also, be aware that serious interactions can occur between medicinal herbs and allopathic medication. Unlike prescription or over-the-counter medications manufactured in the United States, the Food and Drug

Administration does not regulate most herbs. Exceptions are those herbs for which serious safety concerns have been expressed, such as ephedra (also known as ma huang) and comfrey.

### **HOMEOPATHIC HEALING**

Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843) studied the effectiveness of his theory of homeopathic healing through a series of "provings," what we now call clinical trials. The "law of similars," one of the basic principles of



homeopathy, is that small amounts of the substances believed to cause illness should be used to treat that illness. Homeopathic remedies come in various strengths, the more highly diluted (30x) is considered more potent than the less highly diluted (6x). Some homeopathic remedies are so dilute that no molecules of the healing substance actually remain in the solution. However, Hahnemann's theory states that the solutions hold a "trace memory" of the original substance and, therefore, still trigger the body's response. Homeopathic practitioners generally recommend that a homeopathic remedy be used only for a day or two and discontinued if not working. If a patient is interested in homeopathy, recommend that he or she see a homeopathic practitioner for consultation. Contact the

National Center for Homeopathy at [www.homeopathic.org](http://www.homeopathic.org).

*Safety.* The safety of homeopathic remedies during active cancer treatment is not known.

### **MAGNET THERAPY**

Magnet therapy has been used to treat muscle, nerve, and joint pain. A study of magnets for relief of fibromyalgia pain is underway at the University of Virginia.

Magnets come in different shapes and sizes and are available over the counter. They can be inserted in shoes, seat cushions, or mattress pads; small magnetic discs can be taped to the body in the area of discomfort. Typically, no direct sensation is experienced from the magnets. There is no certification of magnet therapy practitioners, but some allopathic pain management specialists are knowledgeable in this area.

*Safety.* Magnet therapy is inappropriate for patients with cardiac pacemakers, defibrillators, thrombocytopenia, bleeding disorders, or anticoagulant therapy. For others, magnets between 300-500 gauss are considered safe.

### **MASSAGE THERAPY**

Massage has been used world-over to treat pain, relieve stress, and correct imbalance. By applying pressure and movement to soft tissue, massage helps to stretch muscles, promote blood and lymph flow, and stimulate the nervous system. Massage has also been used successfully to treat complications of lymphedema and post-operative pain. There are many different types of massage. Swedish massage, which consists primarily of slow rhythmic strokes in the direction of the heart, is most often recommended. Contact the American Massage Therapy Association at [www.amtamassage.org](http://www.amtamassage.org).

*Safety.* Do not massage tumor or metastasis sites. Any massage that is uncomfortable should be stopped. Massage is not recommended for anyone with a rash or unhealed wound, on anticoagulant therapy, or thrombocytopenic.

### **MEDITATION**

Meditation has been shown to reduce high blood pressure and relieve chronic pain, stress, and anxiety. There are many approach-



es to meditation. Transcendental meditation is one of the most common forms of meditation; it involves the repetition of a mantra, any word or sound that has special meaning to the meditator. Mindfulness meditation is another form of meditation where the meditator focuses on the present moment. Breath meditation is a technique in which the meditator focuses on the process of inhaling and exhaling slowly.

**Safety.** There are no known precautions to practicing meditation.

### **THERAPEUTIC TOUCH**

A therapeutic touch (TT) practitioner (often a nurse) moves his or her hands over the patient's body as a focus to redirect energy for healing. Despite the name, TT is generally done without direct physical contact. TT can increase a sense of well-being in patients with cancer and decrease pain. A typical session lasts between 10 to 30 minutes, during which time the recipient sits or lies down fully clothed. The vast majority of patients who participate in TT report feeling deeply relaxed during the treatment. Contact Nurse Healers - Professional Associates International at [www.therapeutic-touch.org](http://www.therapeutic-touch.org).

**Safety.** Inform the TT practitioner of known tumor and metastatic sites before treatment begins. While there is no formal certification procedure, choose a TT practitioner who has completed a formal training course.

### **YOGA**

The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word for union. The ancient practice has been used to lower blood pressure, increase relaxation, maintain flexibility, and improve breathing, overall health, and well-being. Yoga is generally taught in classes, although it can be learned through a video or book. A typical yoga session includes breathing exercises, movement involving a series of positions called asanas, and a brief meditation. Some classes also include vocal chanting. Hatha yoga is one of the more gentle forms of yoga and the most commonly available technique available in the United States. Contact the American Yoga Association at [www.americanyogaassociation.org](http://www.americanyogaassociation.org).

## **Addressing Spiritual Needs**

**“O**ur patients have told us there is a range of healing that must be addressed that is separate from just treating the physical illness,” said Patrick W. McLaughlin, M.D., radiation oncologist and director of the Michael and Rose Assarian Cancer Center. He presented a session about complementary cancer therapies at ACCC's recent National Oncology Economics Conference.

“While clinical expertise is a critical component in caring for our patients, their emotional and spiritual needs are just as important in the healing process. Spiritual and psychological healing should be integrated into traditional cancer center care,” said McLaughlin.

Spirituality in medicine is often ignored in traditional medicine, said McLaughlin. Yet, 90 percent of individuals in the U.S. believe in God, 80 percent pray each day, and 70 percent wish their doctors and nurses would pray with them.

While modern medicine assumes that illness serves no ultimate purpose and only scientifically proven treatments are legitimate, traditional healing views illness as a door to a deeper life. Mind/body effects and prayer are legitimate and important approaches, said McLaughlin, who urged that any complementary therapy program be

organized around a structure that reflects the human spirit.

The Michael and Rose Assarian Cancer Center, a 33,000 square-foot facility, located at Providence Medical Center-Providence Park in Novi, Mich., opened in August 2000. The cancer center is a joint project of Providence Hospital and the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The \$16 million facility not only provides the newest technologies and protocols for cancer diagnosis and treatment but also offers surroundings and programs that promote emotional and spiritual healing. The cancer center features a reflective space containing a dramatic interior pond and garden. In addition, the center's art gallery displays paintings, crafts, and writings of cancer patients. An art therapy room offers a therapeutic outlet for current patients.

Cancer patients often express the “darkest profound moments in their soul” through artwork, said McLaughlin. “Suffering in life often gives individuals a deep compassion and understanding of life that they might never have had.”

Cancer patients are offered a variety of complementary therapies, including massage, meditation, and yoga. “Patients offered yoga for the first time report they haven't felt so relaxed in years,” said McLaughlin.

**Safety.** Yoga postures are not recommended immediately following back injury or surgery. The breathing exercises and meditation practices may be helpful to practice during the healing period. Postures that are uncomfortable or cause pain should be avoided.

There is currently discussion about the safety of combining different elements of ayurveda (India's traditional system of medicine that

strives to restore the innate harmony of the individual), Chinese medicine, and western traditions, for example, when treating illness. Each medical system is considered autonomous and was not developed with the intention of complementing any other system. Therefore, if patients are mixing these traditions, it is well-advised to caution them to consider this issue. ❧