



# Understanding Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer,  
their families and friends



Treatment

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## Understanding Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends

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*Understanding Complementary Therapies* is reviewed approximately every three years.

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### Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This booklet is intended as a general introduction to the topic and should not be seen as a substitute for medical, legal or financial advice. You should obtain independent advice relevant to your specific situation from appropriate professionals, and you may wish to discuss issues raised in this book with them.

All care is taken to ensure that the information in this booklet is accurate at the time of publication. Please note that information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community. Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this booklet.

### Cancer Council

Cancer Council is Australia's peak non-government cancer control organisation. Through the eight state and territory Cancer Councils, we provide a broad range of programs and services to help improve the quality of life of people living with cancer, their families and friends. Cancer Councils also invest heavily in research and prevention. To make a donation and help us beat cancer, visit [cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au) or call your local Cancer Council.



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# Introduction

This booklet has been prepared to help you understand more about complementary therapies, which are used in combination with conventional cancer treatment. There are many reasons why people with cancer consider using complementary therapies. They may offer you physical, emotional and spiritual support, reduce side effects from medical treatment, and improve your quality of life.

This booklet provides an overview of the role of complementary therapies in cancer care. It does not include in-depth information about alternative therapies. If you want to use complementary therapies, discuss this with your doctors, pharmacists and other professionals qualified in the therapies that interest you.

Some terms that may be unfamiliar are explained in the glossary (see pages 77–83). You may also like to pass this booklet to your family and friends for their information.

## How this booklet was developed

This information was developed with help from a range of health professionals. It is based on international and Australian research on complementary therapies.

If you or your family have any questions, call Cancer Council **13 11 20**. We can send you more information and connect you with support services in your area. Turn to the last page of this book for more details.



**Cancer  
Council  
13 11 20**

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# What is cancer?

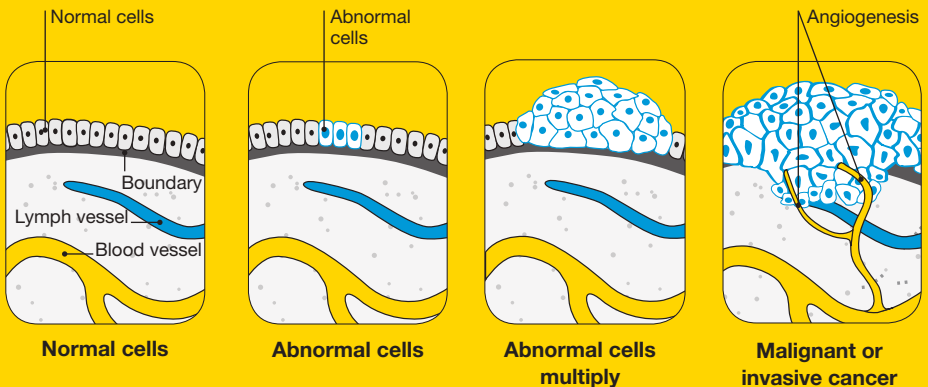
Cancer is a disease of the cells, which are the body's basic building blocks. The body constantly makes new cells to help us grow, replace worn-out tissue and heal injuries. Normally, cells multiply and die in an orderly way.

Sometimes cells don't grow, divide and die in the usual way. This may cause blood or lymph fluid in the body to become abnormal, or form a lump called a tumour. A tumour can be benign or malignant.

**Benign tumour** – Cells are confined to one area and are not able to spread to other parts of the body. This is not cancer.

**Malignant tumour** – This is made up of cancerous cells, which have the ability to spread by travelling through the bloodstream or lymphatic system (lymph fluid).

## How cancer starts



The cancer that first develops in a tissue or organ is called the primary cancer. A malignant tumour is usually named after the organ or type of cell affected.

A malignant tumour that has not spread to other parts of the body is called localised cancer. A tumour may invade deeper into surrounding tissue and can grow its own blood vessels in a process known as angiogenesis.

If cancerous cells grow and form another tumour at a new site, it is called a secondary cancer or metastasis. A metastasis keeps the name of the original cancer. For example, breast cancer that has spread to the bones is called metastatic breast cancer, even though the person may be experiencing symptoms caused by problems in the bones.

## How cancer spreads

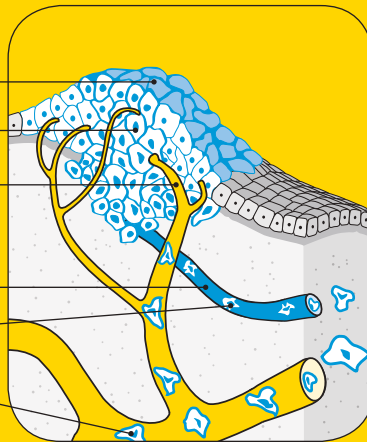
Primary cancer

Local invasion

Angiogenesis –  
tumours grow their  
own blood vessels

Lymph vessel

Metastasis –  
cells invade other  
parts of the body via  
blood vessels and  
lymph vessels





# How is cancer treated?

Following is an overview of some cancer treatments.

**Conventional treatments and medicines** – These can be used to control or treat cancer by slowing or stopping the growth and spread of the disease. They can also provide relief from symptoms. Conventional treatments are based on scientific evidence and clinical trials. They include surgery, radiation therapy (also known as radiotherapy) and systemic treatments, such as chemotherapy, hormone therapy, targeted therapy and immunotherapy.

**Complementary therapies and medicines** – These tend to focus on the whole person, not just the cancer. They are used with conventional medicine, and may help people cope better with symptoms of cancer and/or side effects caused by conventional treatments. Some have been scientifically tested and shown to work. Research into complementary therapies and medicines is growing.

**Alternative therapies and medicines** – These are used in place of conventional treatments and medicine. Many alternative therapies have not been scientifically tested, so there is no proof they stop cancer growing or spreading. Others have been tested and shown not to be effective. While side effects of alternative treatments are not always known, some are serious and can delay or stop the cancer being treated effectively. Examples include coffee enemas and magnet therapy.

**Integrative oncology or medicine** – This is the combined use of conventional treatments and evidence-based complementary therapies. This approach has been adopted by some cancer centres.



## “Complementary” versus “alternative”

The terms “complementary” and “alternative” are often used as though they mean the same thing. And although they are sometimes combined into one phrase – complementary and alternative therapies – they are different. Complementary therapies are used alongside conventional treatments and

medicines, usually to manage side effects. Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional treatments. Many complementary therapies are being scientifically researched for use in people with cancer, while alternative therapies are unlikely to have been tested in this way.

## How do we know treatments work?

Conventional cancer treatments have been through a research process to see whether they work and are safe. This is known as evidence-based medicine. New treatments are first tested in laboratories and then on large groups of people in clinical trials.

Clinical trials involving two groups of people provide the strongest evidence. One group is given the new treatment and the other group is given the existing standard treatment. The results in the two groups are compared to work out which treatment is better. If the new treatment works better than existing treatments, it may become the new standard treatment. This process provides the scientific evidence for the effectiveness and safety of the treatment.

While some complementary therapies are supported by strong evidence, others are not. As their use increases, many are now

being scientifically tested to see whether they are safe for people with cancer, whether they reduce or improve specific symptoms to help people feel better during and after conventional treatment, and how they interact with conventional treatments.

Many alternative therapies and medicines have not been scientifically tested. Others have been tested and shown not to work or to be harmful to people with cancer. Some alternative practitioners promote their therapies and medicines as a cure for cancer, and encourage people to stop using conventional cancer treatment. If this is something you are considering, discuss this with your doctor first.

Alternative therapies can be expensive, and they are not covered by Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), a government-funded scheme that subsidises some prescription medicines. It is important to consider the cost of these therapies if you are thinking about using them.

Cancer Council does not recommend the use of alternative therapies as a treatment for cancer.<sup>1</sup> Complementary therapies that have been proven to be safe to use alongside conventional cancer treatments and medicines are discussed in this booklet.



To find out more about clinical trials, call Cancer Council **13 11 20** for a free copy of *Understanding Clinical Trials and Research*, or download a digital copy from your local website.



## Signs of unsafe therapies

Keep the following warning signs in mind if you are thinking about using an alternative therapy or medicine instead of a conventional treatment or medicine:

- The practitioner does not have a qualification from an accredited educational institution in the therapy they provide.
- The practitioner is not registered with a governing body or a professional association.
- The practitioner tells you that using conventional treatment or medicine will stop their therapy or remedy from working.
- The practitioner asks you not to talk to your doctors about their treatment, or won't tell you the ingredients that make up a herbal preparation they give you.
- The practitioner claims that their treatment cures cancer and other illnesses.
- The practitioner says there are clinical studies for the effectiveness of their remedy or therapy, but does not show you any articles that have appeared in reputable medical journals.
- The treatment costs a lot of money or you need to pay in advance for several months' supply of a remedy.
- All potential side effects have not been explained.
- You need to travel overseas to have the treatment.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) tracks health and medical scams to help the public spot and avoid scams. To find out more, visit their websites at [scamwatch.gov.au](http://scamwatch.gov.au) or [acc.gov.au](http://acc.gov.au).



# Key questions

## Q: What types are there?

**A:** Complementary therapies is a broad term that covers a range of different therapies. They can be grouped into different categories and some fit into more than one category. Many complementary therapies are also part of whole medical systems – see pages 20–23 for information on naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, ayurvedic medicine and homeopathy.



### Mind–body techniques (pages 25–34)

- Art therapy • Counselling • Hypnotherapy • Laughter yoga
- Life coaching • Mindfulness meditation • Music therapy
- Relaxation and meditation • Spiritual practices • Support groups



### Body-based practices (pages 35–46)

- Acupuncture • Aromatherapy • Exercise techniques • Massage
- Qi gong • Reflexology • Tai chi • Yoga



### Energy therapies (pages 47–48)

- Reiki • Healing touch



### Therapies using herbs and plants (pages 49–55)

- Western herbal medicine • Chinese herbal medicine
- Cannabis • Flower remedies



### Therapies based on diet (pages 56–59)

- Balanced diet • Naturopathic nutrition

## Q: Who uses complementary therapies?

**A:** Complementary therapies are widely used by people with cancer in Australia. Research shows that two out of three people with cancer used at least one form of complementary therapy during or after their cancer treatment.<sup>2</sup> Women are the most common users of complementary therapies.

## Q: Why do people use these therapies?

**A:** There are many reasons why people diagnosed with cancer use complementary therapies.<sup>2</sup> For some, it is to try to improve their quality of life. Other reasons include:

- taking a more active part in their health
- managing the symptoms and side effects of conventional cancer treatment, such as fatigue, nausea or pain
- boosting the immune system to help fight infection
- strengthening the body to cope with treatment
- looking for a more holistic way of treating the whole person
- managing changes in sexuality (libido, self-esteem and intimate relationships).

### Complementary therapy use in palliative care

Many palliative care services offer complementary therapies to patients to help improve their quality of life. Most commonly, these include mind-body techniques such as massage, aromatherapy, relaxation and meditation. Health professionals involved in palliative care often support complementary therapy use.

## Q: Should I tell my doctor?

**A:** Yes. Discuss any therapy you may be using or are thinking about using with your doctors. It's important to tell your doctors before you start using any complementary therapy, especially if you are having chemotherapy or radiation therapy or taking medicines. See page 64 for more information.

It's also important to tell your complementary therapist that you have cancer, and advise them of the conventional treatments and medicines you're having.

## Q: Which therapies work?

**A:** Cancer Council supports the use of complementary therapies that have been proven to be safe and effective in scientific studies. Not all therapies in this book have been scientifically proven to be clinically effective. Where the evidence is not available, the possible benefits and any harm they might cause should be considered by you and your health care team.

Personal (anecdotal) evidence from people with cancer – and, in some cases, a long history of use in traditional medicine – suggest that particular therapies may be useful for some people. Evidence supporting the different therapies is summarised in the individual chapters.

There is some level of evidence from clinical trials that the therapies in the table opposite can help manage symptoms and side effects of cancer and its treatment.<sup>3,4</sup>

<b>Complementary therapy*</b>	<b>Clinically proven benefits</b>
<b>acupuncture</b>	reduces chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting; improves quality of life
<b>aromatherapy</b>	improves sleep and quality of life
<b>art therapy, music therapy</b>	reduce anxiety and stress; manage fatigue; aid expression of feelings
<b>counselling, support groups</b>	help reduce distress, anxiety and depression; improve quality of life
<b>exercise</b>	helps manage fatigue; improves balance, coordination and quality of life
<b>hypnotherapy</b>	reduces pain, anxiety, nausea and vomiting
<b>massage</b>	improves quality of life; reduces anxiety, depression, pain and nausea
<b>meditation, relaxation, mindfulness</b>	reduce stress and anxiety; improve coping and quality of life
<b>nutrition</b>	prevents and manages malnutrition; helps heal wounds and damaged tissue
<b>qi gong</b>	reduces anxiety and fatigue; improves quality of life
<b>spiritual practices</b>	help reduce stress; instil peace; improve ability to manage challenges
<b>tai chi</b>	reduces anxiety and stress; improves strength, flexibility and quality of life
<b>yoga</b>	reduces anxiety and stress; improves general wellbeing and quality of life

*\* Listed in alphabetical order*

## Q: Are they safe?

**A:** Many complementary therapies have been evaluated and are safe and effective to use together with conventional cancer treatment and medicine. However, some complementary therapies can affect the way conventional treatments and medicines work, and even stop them from working altogether.

Sometimes people think natural products are safe, but this isn't always true. Some products may affect how well other medicines work in your body. See the information on individual therapies in the following chapters and *Tips for using herbal products safely* on page 52 for more details on potential side effects and other considerations.

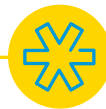
## Regulation of medicinal products

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is a federal government department that regulates all medicines sold in Australia, including complementary medicines. This includes herbs, vitamins, minerals, nutritional supplements, homeopathic remedies and some aromatherapy products.

The regulation of complementary medicines helps to protect the public by ensuring that therapeutic goods are made according to Good Manufacturing Practice and that any adverse reactions can be investigated.

All therapeutic goods supplied in Australia – whether made in Australia or overseas – must be included on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG).





To ensure medicines are safe, it is best to buy Australian-made complementary medicines. For more information on the safety, labelling and regulation of medicines, visit [tga.gov.au](https://www.tga.gov.au).

To be included on the ARTG, medicines will be given one of the following two codes depending on the level of risk. This must be displayed on the medicine label.

**Aust R (registered)** – Because these products are considered higher risk, they are evaluated by the TGA for safety, quality and how well they work. They include all prescription medicines, most over-the-counter medicines and some higher-risk complementary medicines.

**Aust L (listed)** – These products make low-level therapeutic claims and are reviewed for safety and quality only. They include sunscreen, vitamin and mineral supplements, and herbal medicines.

## Regulation of complementary therapists

In Australia, health practitioners, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and Chinese medicine practitioners, are regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Each health profession that is part of AHPRA is also represented by a national board. AHPRA ensures that practitioners have the necessary qualifications and training to practise. See [ahpra.gov.au](https://www.ahpra.gov.au) for more details.

There are no regulations for other complementary therapists, but several types of complementary therapists are affiliated with a professional organisation. However, membership is voluntary, which means there is no legal obligation to join. Without regulation, there is no legal requirement that a complementary therapist is qualified, trained or experienced.

The following complementary therapists or practitioners have regulatory bodies.

**Naturopaths and Western herbalists** – These practitioners are not registered by AHPRA. However, most naturopaths and herbalists are registered with the Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists (ARONAH). This is a self-governing body that sets minimum standards of practice for both professions. See [aronah.org](http://aronah.org).

**Homeopaths** – These practitioners are not registered by AHPRA. However, the Australian Register of Homoeopaths (AROH) represents homeopaths who are qualified to practise in line with government standards. The AROH outlines the necessary professional standards for registered homeopaths, who must meet continuing education requirements each year. See [aroh.com.au](http://aroh.com.au).



To find the right complementary therapy and therapist for you, see pages 73–76 for a list of general questions to ask.

## Q: What can I do if something goes wrong?

**A:** If you experience any side effects that you think are from a complementary therapy, stop the treatment and talk to your practitioner about your options. These may include adjusting your treatment, stopping the treatment permanently, seeking a second opinion, or changing your care to another qualified practitioner.

If you are concerned that a practitioner has been negligent, incompetent or unethical, consider the following options:

- If the practitioner belongs to a professional association, contact the association with a formal complaint (see pages 70–71 for contact details).
- Report adverse reactions to NPS MedicineWise’s Adverse Medicine Events Line on 1300 134 237. You can also tell your doctor, who will report it to the TGA.
- Contact the health care complaints commission in your state or territory (see next page for contact details). These organisations protect public health and safety by investigating and resolving complaints about health care providers. They can also prosecute serious complaints.
- If you have a serious reaction, call 000 or go straight to your nearest hospital emergency department.

## Making complaints about health care providers

State/territory	Contact details
<b>ACT</b>	<b>ACT Human Rights Commission</b> 02 6205 2222 hrc.act.gov.au
<b>NSW</b>	<b>Health Care Complaints Commission</b> 1800 043 159 hccc.nsw.gov.au
<b>NT</b>	<b>Health and Community Services Complaints Commission</b> 1800 004 474 hcscn.nt.gov.au
<b>QLD</b>	<b>Office of the Health Ombudsman</b> 133 646 oho.qld.gov.au
<b>SA</b>	<b>Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner</b> 08 8226 8666; 1800 232 007 (toll free from country SA) hcscn.sa.gov.au
<b>TAS</b>	<b>Health Complaints Commissioner Tasmania</b> 1800 001 170 www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au
<b>VIC</b>	<b>Health Complaints Commissioner</b> 1300 582 113 hcc.vic.gov.au
<b>WA</b>	<b>Health and Disability Services Complaints Office</b> 08 6551 7600; 1800 813 583 (toll free from country WA) hadscn.wa.gov.au



## Key points

- Complementary therapies are widely used in Australia. It's estimated that two out of three people with cancer use some type of complementary therapy during or after their cancer treatment. Women are the highest users.
- People use complementary therapies for many reasons including improving quality of life, taking an active role in their care, liking the idea of treating the whole person, and managing side effects.
- There is less scientific evidence available about the safety and effectiveness of complementary therapies than there is for conventional treatments and medicines.
- Always see a qualified practitioner with relevant qualifications who can provide you with an expert opinion and is happy to work with you and your doctor.
- The federal government's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods sold in Australia. These include complementary medicines such as minerals, vitamins, herbal medicines, nutritional supplements, homeopathic medicines and some aromatherapy products.
- Tell your doctor and your complementary therapist about all drugs, herbs, nutritional supplements and other remedies you take. Herbs and conventional treatments can sometimes interact, stopping medicines from working properly or causing side effects.
- It is important that you let your doctor know if you are considering using alternative therapies instead of conventional cancer treatments and medicines.



# Whole medical systems

Most types of complementary therapies are part of whole medical systems. Whole medical systems aim to treat the whole person – mind, body and spirit – not just the disease and its symptoms.

In Australia, the main whole medical systems used are naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine and homeopathy. Their origins differ, but they share the following concepts:

- The body needs to be balanced physically, emotionally and spiritually to be healthy.
- Ill health often has more than one cause.
- The body has a vital energy reflecting its level of health and wellbeing.
- The body can heal itself.
- Health care is usually tailored to the individual.

## Remedies from different cultures

Australia's cultural diversity means some people may want to use traditional healing practices as part of their complementary cancer care.

For example, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cancer may want

the guidance of a traditional doctor or elder who is familiar with bush medicine and Aboriginal spirituality.

Talk to your doctor if you would like to use traditional remedies from your culture alongside conventional treatments.

## Naturopathy

**What it is:** Naturopathy is based on the belief that good health depends on the balance between the mind, body and spirit, and that the body can heal itself through nutrition and lifestyle changes. Naturopathy is based on six principles: the healing power of nature; identify and treat the causes; first do no harm; doctor as teacher; treat the whole person; and focus on prevention.

**What to expect:** After taking a case history, a naturopath may suggest a combination of diet changes, various forms of massage or exercise, and herbal or nutritional remedies.

**Evidence:** Some aspects of naturopathy, such as massage and nutrition (excluding extreme dietary practices), have good clinical evidence for people with cancer. Other aspects of naturopathy have mixed levels of evidence. See massage (pages 41–43), herbal products (page 51), acupuncture (pages 35–36) for more information.

## Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)

**What it is:** TCM is based on the idea of a connection between mind, body and environment to prevent and manage diseases. See the next page for more information about TCM principles.

TCM considers the person's overall condition, not just their symptoms. TCM includes several different practices, including acupuncture, breathing and movement exercises called qi gong, movement exercises called tai chi, the practice of burning herbs near the skin called moxibustion, herbal medicine and foods.

**What to expect:** A TCM practitioner will take a case history and may do a physical examination. This could include looking at your tongue and taking your pulse (tongue and pulse analysis) to work out the flow of energy and imbalances in your body. Treatment is tailored to each person using a variety of therapies.

**Evidence:** There is clinical evidence for the benefits of some aspects of TCM for people with cancer, while for other aspects the evidence is limited. For benefits and evidence of specific TCM therapies, see acupuncture (pages 35–36), qi gong (page 44), tai chi (pages 45–46) and Chinese herbal medicine (page 53).

## Beliefs behind TCM

According to Chinese medicine and other medical systems from Asia, everyone has a vital energy or force known as qi (pronounced “chee”). When healthy, qi flows easily through the body’s meridians (pathways). If the flow of qi becomes blocked, the body’s harmony and balance is affected, causing disease.

Qi is made up of two opposite and complementary forces known as Yin and Yang.

In TCM, the belief is that Yin and Yang are in everything. Yin is represented by water and Yang by fire. The balance between the two maintains harmony in your body, mind and the universe.

TCM also uses the theory of five elements – fire, earth, metal, water and wood – to explain how the body works. These elements correspond to particular organs and tissues in the body.



## Ayurvedic medicine

**What it is:** Ayurvedic medicine is an ancient Indian system founded on the concept that health is achieved when the mind, body and spirit are in balance. The term Ayurveda comes from the Sanskrit words ayur (life) and veda (knowledge). According to Ayurvedic theory, everyone is a combination of five elements: air, water, fire, earth and space. These elements form three energies or life forces called doshas: vata, kapha and pitta.

Ayurvedic practitioners use a wide range of therapies, including nutritional and herbal medicine, massage, meditation and yoga.

**What to expect:** An Ayurvedic practitioner takes a case history and assesses vital force and balance in the body, often by looking at your tongue and by taking your pulse. Treatment may include one or more of the therapies listed above.

**Evidence:** There is good evidence for the effectiveness of some treatments that are part of Ayurvedic medicine, such as massage (pages 41–42), meditation (page 32) and yoga (page 46). There is limited clinical evidence on the herbal remedies and certain diets used by Ayurvedic therapists.

## Homeopathy

**What it is:** A system of health care based on the theory that “like cures like”. This means small, highly diluted substances from plants, minerals or animals are used to stimulate similar symptoms in a healthy body to the symptoms you are experiencing.

This is said to stimulate energy in the body that relieves the symptoms of ill health, helps restore vitality and reduces emotional imbalances in the body. Homeopathic remedies are made from plant, mineral and animal substances that are diluted in water.

**What to expect:** A homeopath 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. You may also be given a cream for your skin, if appropriate.

**Evidence:** There is no reliable scientific evidence that homeopathy helps ease skin damage caused by radiation therapy or menopausal symptoms of women with breast cancer.

“After the lumpectomy operation, I didn’t feel pain but I was really nauseous, so I took a homeopathic remedy to quell this.” Catherine (breast cancer)



# Mind–body techniques

Mind–body techniques are based on the belief that what we think and feel can affect our physical and mental wellbeing. When our emotions or mental state are under pressure, our physical body can be affected. Similarly, physical symptoms can have a negative impact on our mood and mental wellbeing. Mind–body techniques may also be called psychological techniques, emotional therapies or spiritual healing.

Examples of mind–body techniques include art therapy, counselling, hypnotherapy, laughter yoga, life coaching, mindfulness meditation, music therapy, relaxation, spiritual practices, and support groups. Some techniques, such as support groups and counselling, have now become part of standard cancer care. Spiritual practices are included because of the important part they play in many people’s lives and their value in providing emotional support.

Many complementary therapies focus on the mind–body connection in different ways. Acupuncture, tai chi, qi gong, yoga and massage can help with both emotional and physical problems. However, as these techniques are first directed at the physical body (e.g. moving the limbs into a certain pose), they are outlined in the *Body-based practices* chapter (see pages 35–46).



A qualified therapist can help you manage any strong emotions that arise during the treatment session. For details on how to find a practitioner to help you explore mind–body techniques, see *Professional associations* on pages 70–71.

**Benefits:** Scientific studies suggest that mind–body techniques can benefit people who have cancer by reducing the symptoms and side effects of cancer and its treatment. These include pain, anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, fear and difficulty sleeping, which can all affect mood and overall wellbeing. See the individual therapies in this chapter for more details.

**Side effects:** Sometimes people feel overwhelmed by the emotions they experience during or after a session. This usually settles soon afterwards. If not, contact your therapist for further support.

## Art therapy

**What it is:** A way to express feelings using visual art.

**Why use it:** Participants work through issues that come up while creating art. It can also help with solving problems, improving mood and reducing stress.

**What to expect:** Art therapy may be done individually or in a group. You don't need to be good at art to benefit or participate – the emphasis is on the process of producing artwork, not on the result. You can create any type of art: drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or digital work. You will discuss the work with the therapist to encourage an understanding of your emotions and concerns.

**Evidence:** Clinical studies have shown that art therapy helps manage symptoms of fatigue. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it improves coping skills, emotional wellbeing and quality of life.

## Counselling

**What it is:** Through discussions with a counsellor or psychologist, you can identify both positive and troubling aspects in your life. You can focus on your goals, your relationships or particular challenges you are facing. Counselling allows you to explore ways of resolving negative thoughts and feelings that impact on your health and day-to-day life.

**Why use it:** Counselling allows you to identify, understand and express your emotions, motivations, life choices and behaviours in a safe, objective and confidential environment. It can help with self-esteem, communication and relationships.

**What to expect:** Consultations are usually face to face, but if you live in a remote area or require crisis counselling, you may be able to talk with a counsellor over the phone or online.

**Evidence:** There is long-established evidence of the benefits of counselling. However, it is important that you find a suitably qualified counsellor you feel comfortable talking with.

### Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

CBT is a common type of talk therapy used by psychologists to help people identify unhelpful thoughts and behaviours, and change how they respond to them. It can also be used to manage distress and pain. CBT can teach you how to calm your body and mind, focus your thinking and improve your outlook.

## Getting help

If you're interested in counselling, meditation and relaxation, you can seek help from a variety of health professionals and services.

Counsellors can help clients come up with strategies for managing their concerns.

Psychologists guide people through issues with how they think, feel and learn. They cannot prescribe medicines.

Psychiatrists are trained medical doctors who have specialised in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness. They can prescribe medicines to help a range of mental and emotional conditions.

For a referral to these practitioners, call Cancer Council **13 11 20** or ask your GP for suggestions, as you may be eligible for a Medicare rebate for some of these

services. You can also visit **psychology.org.au** and use the "Find a Psychologist" search to look for a practitioner in your area.

Online self-help programs or smartphone apps can help you track how you're feeling, and most are free to download. Visit **moodgym.com.au** or **mindspot.org.au**.

Some hospitals, cancer support groups and community centres offer relaxation and meditation groups. There are also many self-help CDs, DVDs and smartphone apps that will guide you through the different techniques. Cancer Council produces relaxation and meditation CDs. Call **13 11 20** for free copies.

For 24-hour crisis support, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**.

## Hypnotherapy

**What it is:** Deep relaxation that is used to help people become more aware of their inner thoughts.

**Why use it:** Hypnotherapy can improve mental wellbeing and quality of life. It can help to overcome mental blocks that prevent people dealing with issues such as anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, pain, insomnia and unwanted habits such as smoking.

**What to expect:** Your therapist will take a case history and then lead you into a deeply relaxed state, known as an altered state of consciousness. Being in a relaxed state allows your subconscious to focus on your treatment goals, which then become more achievable for your conscious mind.

**Evidence:** Hypnotherapy has been clinically tested with good results for helping people cope with pain, anxiety, nausea and vomiting related to cancer treatment.

Some people find online programs or smartphone apps helpful for tracking how they're feeling. A list of health and wellbeing apps is available at [healthdirect.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing-apps](https://healthdirect.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing-apps).



## Laughter yoga

**What it is:** Laughter yoga, or laughter therapy, combines laughter-based activities, clapping and breathing into an exercise routine to encourage overall health and wellbeing.

**Why use it:** The natural process of laughter is used to relieve physical and emotional stress. It can help lower blood pressure, reduce pain and boost the immune system.

**What to expect:** In a group setting, you'll be taken through a number of laughter exercises. These are not based on humour or jokes, but on laughter as a physical exercise.

**Evidence:** Research shows laughter has a positive impact on our physical and mental wellbeing and can stimulate the release of endorphins, the feel-good hormones.

## Life coaching

**What it is:** Life coaching is a type of counselling in which a coach works with a client to set goals and work out ways to change their life to achieve them.

**Why use it:** Life coaching allows people to make positive changes to their future personal, spiritual, physical and professional lives.

**What to expect:** Your life coach will help you to clarify your thoughts about what you want in life, and to reassess any beliefs or values that may have prevented you from experiencing fulfilment in the past. Sessions can be face to face, over the phone or online.

**Evidence:** There is limited clinical evidence about the benefits of life coaching. However, one small study has shown that it may help people cope better with life after cancer treatment.



## Mindfulness meditation

**What it is:** Mindfulness meditation means paying attention to the present moment by focusing on the breath and observing each rise and fall. There are several different types. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a 6–8 week course designed to help you cope better and be at ease in your life.

**Why use it:** People practise mindfulness to change the way they think about experiences.

**What to expect:** Lying or sitting in a comfortable position, a counsellor or psychologist will lead you through a series of exercises that focus on breath work and calming the mind.

**Evidence:** There is good evidence to show that MBSR lowers the levels of stress hormones in your body, which can assist in healing, and improves immune function. Studies on mindfulness meditation show it helps improve the quality of life of people with cancer, increases coping, and can reduce pain, anxiety, depression and nausea.

## Music therapy

**What it is:** The use of music to improve health and wellbeing. A music therapist helps people engage with different aspects of music.

**Why use it:** Music therapy can help people express themselves, feel more in control, focus on healing, feel less anxious, and simply enjoy themselves in the moment.

**What to expect:** You don't need to be musical to participate or benefit. The structure of the session will depend on the needs of the participants. You may play instruments, sing, or write lyrics, or you may simply listen to music and discuss how it affects you.

**Evidence:** Some studies in people with cancer have shown that music therapy can improve anxiety, depression, pain and fatigue.

## Relaxation and meditation

**What it is:** Relaxation uses slow breathing and muscle-loosening exercises to physically and mentally calm the body. Meditation focuses your attention on the senses of the body, such as breathing. It is an important part of ancient Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. There are different types of relaxation and meditation techniques. Guided imagery or visualisation use sound and vision to encourage your imagination to create pleasant thoughts.

**Why use it:** Relaxation and meditation may help to release muscle tension and reduce anxiety and depression.

**What to expect:** Serene music may be played to create a peaceful environment. A counsellor will guide you through exercises and then, after a period of relaxation, you will usually be prompted to stay awake to enjoy your relaxed state of mind.

**Evidence:** Clinical studies have shown that people being treated for cancer who practise relaxation have lower levels of anxiety, stress, pain and depression.

## Spiritual practices

**What they are:** 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, or a search for meaning and purpose in their lives.

**Why use them:** Often when people are diagnosed with cancer, the spiritual aspect of their lives becomes more important. People may find comfort in prayer, meditation or quiet contemplation. Receiving care from a spiritual care practitioner, who may also be called a pastoral carer or chaplain, can often help people, even if they are not part of an organised religion.

**What to expect:** If you are part of a spiritual or religious community, you may benefit from:

- prayer or meditation groups
- a feeling of unity from the congregation
- healing services for the sick
- practical and spiritual support offered by members of your spiritual or religious community.

If you are not part of a formal community, you can find further information about your area of spiritual interest from support groups, friendship groups, your local library or online.

**Evidence:** There is growing scientific evidence of a positive link between spiritual practices and health. They have been shown to reduce stress, instil peace and improve ability to manage challenges.


## Support groups

**What they are:** Organised groups where people with cancer and their families can come together regularly to discuss shared experiences. They include face-to-face and telephone support groups, online discussion forums and peer support programs.

**Why use them:** Getting in touch with other people living with cancer can offer emotional support, and help people feel less alone.

**What to expect:** In these support settings, most people feel they can speak openly and share their experiences with others.

**Evidence:** There is strong evidence that cancer support groups improve quality of life. Joining a group helps reduce distress, depression and anxiety. Studies have also shown benefits for people using online health forums. However, they may not suit everyone.

“My family members don't really understand what it's like to have cancer thrown at you, but in my support group, I don't feel like I have to explain.”  Ray (prostate cancer)



# Body-based practices

The term body-based practices refers to complementary therapies that work directly on your body. They may also be described as bodywork or touch therapies.

Some techniques are passive – therapists apply some form of touch or manual pressure to your body. Examples include aromatherapy, massage and reflexology.

Other practices require you to actively undertake a series of movements to stimulate and stretch different parts of the body. Examples include yoga, tai chi and Pilates.

Some of the body-based practices discussed in this chapter have a strong mind–body connection, so they benefit both physical and emotional health. These include yoga, tai chi and qi gong.

**Benefits:** The benefits of body-based practices include reducing tension, anxiety, insomnia and pain, and increasing energy, vitality, quality of life and wellbeing. Exercise, even if gentle, can also improve stamina, muscle tone (strength), flexibility and agility.

**Side effects/safety:** To reduce the potential for harm, check the practitioner is qualified.

## Acupuncture

**What it is:** Acupuncturists put fine, sterile needles just under the skin into energy channels called meridians to stimulate energy flow. Each meridian has many acupuncture points along its path.

**Why use it:** Acupuncture is based on the theory that the placement of needles into certain points of the body unblocks and moves qi (vital energy, see page 22) to strengthen and reduce physical and emotional symptoms. Research suggests that the needles stimulate the nervous system and the connective tissue in the body, and help produce certain biomolecules such as hormones.

**What to expect:** After a consultation, which may include tongue and pulse analysis, the practitioner gently positions sterile needles into points on your body. The needles are left in place for 30 seconds to 30 minutes, and may be stimulated manually by twirling the needles, or by using a machine (called electro-acupuncture). You may feel a tingling or dull aching sensation, but should not feel pain. Acupuncturists may also implant and cover special needles called press needles, which can remain in place for several days.

**Evidence:** The main areas of research into acupuncture for cancer are chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting, and it is included in clinical guidelines for dealing with side effects. Evidence suggests acupuncture may also reduce anxiety, fatigue, hot flushes and some types of pain. It's not clear whether acupuncture helps relieve dry mouth and chemotherapy-induced tingling in the hands and feet (peripheral neuropathy), but several studies are underway.



Some qualified and registered acupuncturists in Australia have special training and experience in treating cancer-related conditions. Ask your doctor whether this is offered at your treatment centre.

## Aromatherapy

**What it is:** The use of essential oils extracted from plants for healing relaxation. They are used mainly during massage but can also be used in baths, inhalations or vaporisers (oil burners).

**Why use it:** When inhaled or absorbed through the skin during massage, the oils have a positive effect on the body's tissues.

**What to expect:** The aromatherapist blends essential oils and adds them to a base (carrier) oil before being applying them to your skin during a massage.

**Evidence:** There is limited evidence that aromatherapy may have positive short-term effects on pain and anxiety in people with cancer. Studies of people with advanced cancer show that aromatherapy improves sleep and quality of life.

### Oils used in bodywork

Base (or carrier) oils are usually made from kernels or nuts, such as almonds. Sometimes mineral oil is used instead as it is odourless.

Before being applied to the skin, base oils are diluted with essential oils, such as lavender or tea tree.

Reactions to oils are rare, but some people find they irritate the skin or the smell makes them feel nauseous or gives them a headache.

Let your therapist know if you have had reactions to oils in the past, or if you find certain smells unpleasant.

## Exercise techniques

### What they are

Exercise and physical activity cover four types of exercise:

- aerobic
- strength training
- balance
- flexibility.

### Why use them

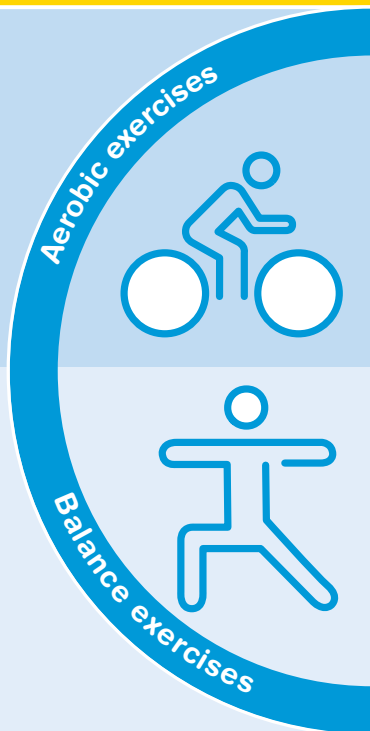
Exercise is generally accepted as being beneficial for improving strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing. Some treatment centres have exercise physiologists and physiotherapists who are specially trained in exercise interventions for people with medical conditions and injuries.

Aerobic exercise uses large muscle groups and causes your heart rate to rise. It may reduce the onset of side effects and their severity, maintain mood and improve energy levels.

Examples include walking, swimming, running and cycling, but everyday activities such as gardening and housework count.

Balance is the ability to control your body's position whether standing still or moving. Having good balance can help prevent falls and is important for daily activities such as walking, and going up and down stairs.

Examples include yoga, tai chi and Pilates.



To find an appropriate exercise program, ask your GP for a referral to an exercise physiologist or physiotherapist, or call Cancer Council **13 11 20**.



### What to expect

To help avoid injury, start each session with a warm-up and finish with a cool-down. Do aerobic exercise at a level you are comfortable with. Aim to do 2–3 strength sessions each week, with rest days between sessions. To maintain flexibility, include 3–4 stretch sessions a week.

### Evidence

Research suggests that exercise benefits most people both during and after cancer treatment.

Call Cancer Council 13 11 20 for a free copy of *Exercise for People Living with Cancer*, and to find out about programs in your local area.

Strength training



Also known as resistance training or weight training, strength training involves making your muscles work harder than usual against some sort of resistance.

Strength training can be done with hand weights, special elastic resistance bands, weight machines at gyms and your own body weight.

Flexibility exercises



Flexibility exercises stretch your muscles and help improve your range of motion. Being flexible gives you more freedom of movement for other exercises as well as for everyday activities.

Examples include yoga, tai chi and Pilates.

YWCA Encore offers a free eight-week program of gentle water-based exercise and relaxation for people who have had breast cancer. For more details, visit [ywcaencore.org.au](http://ywcaencore.org.au).

## Other movement therapies

### **Alexander technique –**

Although not a type of exercise, this therapy teaches people ways to improve posture and movement, and to use muscles efficiently. By changing the way people use their body, they can enhance mental and physical functioning on many levels.

### **Bowen technique**

**(Bowtech)** – A practitioner applies gentle pressure over acupuncture and reflex points to massage the muscles and soft tissue and tendons. A Bowen session lasts up to an hour and the average number of treatments is 3–4.

**Feldenkrais method** – This series of guided movements focuses on balance and flexibility. It helps people

become more aware of the way they move and how this contributes to, or compensates for, bad posture, pain and mobility restrictions. Trained practitioners use touch, movement, guided imagery and mindful body awareness to stimulate the brain to make improvements to movement and posture.

**Pilates** – This system of strengthening and stretching exercises is designed to develop the body's core (abdominals, lower back and hips). It encourages the mind to be aware of its control over the muscles and to correct postural habits that have contributed to pain, reduced mobility and poor coordination. Pilates started as a form of physical therapy.

While studies with cancer patients are limited, these forms of practitioner-led movement exercise are generally considered to be beneficial for improving breathing, strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing.


## Massage

**What it is:** Massage involves moving (manipulating) muscles and rubbing or stroking soft tissues of the body. There are many different styles of massage. Oncology massage therapists are specially trained to adjust pressure, speed, duration and direction of strokes to provide a safe session for a person with cancer at any stage of disease.

Some types of massage can reduce lymphoedema (swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid). This is called manual lymphatic drainage.

**Why use it:** All styles of massage aim to promote deep relaxation in tissue by applying pressure to the body's muscles and pressure points. This helps to release both muscular and emotional tension. The style of massage used for people during or after cancer treatment will depend on the treatment they're having.

Over the years, there has been a general concern that massage can increase the risk of cancer cells spreading to other parts of the body. However, there is no evidence that this happens.



Massage may be available in some hospitals and palliative care units. Ask your doctor or nurse if it's offered at the centre where you are having your treatment. To find a private practitioner trained in oncology massage, visit [oncologymassagetraining.com.au](http://oncologymassagetraining.com.au) and enter your postcode in the "Find Your Nearest Therapist" box.

“ Having a regular massage with a lymphoedema practitioner 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 relieved discomfort and tightness. ” *Lilly*

**What to expect:** Massage usually occurs in a warm, quiet room. It can be given while you either lie on a massage table or sit in a chair. The therapist uses a variety of strokes on different parts of the body. When performing massage on a person with cancer, therapists may need to adjust their pressure and avoid certain areas of the body.

Some styles of massage are done with you fully clothed; others require you to undress to your underwear so the therapist can use oil to move their hands over your skin more easily. The therapist may place pillows under different parts of your body so they’re supported. Let the therapist know if you need anything to feel more comfortable, such as a change in pressure or another blanket. You may like to close your eyes during the massage.

**Evidence:** Many scientific studies have shown that oncology massage is effective in reducing symptoms such as stress, pain, anxiety, depression, nausea and fatigue in people who have had chemotherapy or surgery for cancer.

Specialised lymphatic massage can help reduce the symptoms of lymphoedema.

## Massage concerns for people with cancer

**Chemotherapy** – This drug treatment affects the whole body. If you have a chemotherapy port, massage should not be done in this area. Some people who have chemotherapy experience tingling in their hands or feet (peripheral neuropathy), and may find they bruise or bleed easily. Massage should be light with no pressure on the affected areas.

**Radiation therapy** – The skin may be sensitive to touch after radiation therapy. It may look red and appear sunburnt. If you are having radiation therapy, you should avoid massage to the treated area as you may find even light touch uncomfortable. Massage oils may make already irritated skin feel worse.

**Surgery** – Recovery after surgery takes time, and it's important to avoid massaging the area of the operation.

However, gentle “lotioning” massage with soft hands or gently holding other areas can provide comfort and support.

### **Risk of lymphoedema** –

If you've had lymph nodes removed from the neck, armpit or groin during diagnosis or treatment, or if you've had radiation therapy to these areas, you should only have a very gentle massage in that area of the body. Ideally massage needs to be part of a manual lymphatic drainage or total lymphatic drainage treatment. Therapists not trained in these techniques should avoid the affected area. To find a registered lymphoedema practitioner, see [lymphoedema.org.au](http://lymphoedema.org.au).

**Bone fragility** – Radiation therapy or medicines, or the cancer itself, may cause the bones to become more fragile. Care should be taken to avoid undue pressure.

## Qi gong

**What it is:** Qi gong – pronounced “chee goong” – is part of TCM. “Qi” means vital energy and “gong” means work. Qi gong combines movement with controlled breathing and meditation. It may also be considered an energy therapy (see page 47).

**Why use it:** Movements performed in qi gong keep the flow of energy running through the body’s energy channels. This can help improve quality of life, including mental and physical wellbeing.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. The session starts with warm-up exercises to loosen the body. The instructor then guides you through a series of slow movements, which help you become more aware of your energy. Classes might also include meditation while you are lying down, sitting, standing or walking.

**Evidence:** Clinical studies suggest that qi gong improves quality of life and reduces fatigue, pain and anxiety. Anecdotal evidence shows that it helps to improve general fitness.

## Reflexology

**What it is:** A form of foot and hand massage. It’s based on the belief that certain areas on the feet and hands or “reflex points” correspond to the body’s internal organs and systems, like a map.

**Why use it:** Many people find reflexology relaxing. By pressing on reflex points, meridians are unblocked and this can promote health on the related area of the body.

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

**Evidence:** Several clinical trials have looked at using reflexology for pain, anxiety, breathlessness and quality of life. Studies have involved small groups of people, so it is difficult to say whether the reflexology had any effect.

## Tai chi

**What it is:** A part of TCM, tai chi combines gentle movement, deep breathing techniques and meditation. Movements create stability in the body, reflecting an ancient Chinese concept of balance known as Yin and Yang (see page 22).

**Why use it:** The breath work of tai chi is calming and meditative. Creating and holding the poses helps to loosen and strengthen the muscles. Tai chi can be modified for groups that are less mobile.

**What to expect:** During class there will be serene music playing. The class usually starts with warm-up exercises. You will be shown different moves and assisted to perform them. The instructor may use names to describe the poses, for example, “white crane spreads its wings”. The movements are simple to start with, 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 quality of life, balance, agility, flexibility and muscle tone in cancer survivors. It can also help reduce anxiety, depression and stress.

## Yoga

**What it is:** Yoga involves holding postures (asanas) with the body, slowing and deepening the breath, and focusing the mind. Yoga originated in India and is now popular around the world. There are many styles of yoga with varying intensity – from gentle, such as hatha yoga, to vigorous, such as ashtanga and Iyengar yoga. Some styles may not be suitable during some stages of cancer.

**Why use it:** Yoga helps both physical and emotional health.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. You may be asked to remove your shoes before entering the yoga room. You usually need a yoga mat – this may be available in class. Most classes last for 1–2 hours. A typical routine involves focusing on quietening the mind and working with the breath. A session usually begins with warm-up stretches followed by a series of yoga postures, and ends with relaxation. Some cancer centres offer yoga classes that are geared to people during cancer treatment or recovery.

**Evidence:** Clinical research has shown that yoga has positive effects on decreasing stress and enhancing quality of life. The focus on breathing may also help reduce pain.





# Energy therapies

Energy therapy is based on the belief that the body has an invisible energy field, and that when this energy flow is blocked or unbalanced, you can become sick. Unblocking this energy can help promote healing and wellbeing.

This vital energy or life force is known by different names in different whole medical systems – for example, qi in TCM and prana in Ayurvedic medicine.

Examples of energy therapies include polarity therapy, reiki, healing touch and therapeutic touch. Some of these are covered here.

**Benefits:** Energy therapies are very gentle and do not require the therapist to make any heavy physical adjustments. They are used to help people feel relaxed and less anxious, and to improve overall wellbeing. There is no scientific evidence of an energy field or that energy therapies have any benefits.

**Side effects:** As energy therapies are not invasive, they are considered to be safe.

## Reiki

**What it is:** The term reiki is a Japanese word meaning universal life energy. It is a form of gentle hands-on therapy using energy fields within and around the body.

**Why use it:** People use reiki to improve physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

**What to expect:** During a reiki session a client sits or lies down fully clothed. The therapist places their hands in a series of positions on or slightly above your body. The aim is to use their own healing energy to identify energy imbalances and promote health. This may generate a feeling of warmth.

**Evidence:** Anecdotal evidence suggests that reiki is calming and relaxing, often helping to relieve pain and anxiety, reduce stiffness and improve posture.

## Healing touch

**What it is:** The placement of hands in specific sequences above or on the body to assess and determine areas of energy imbalance, which are generally experienced as temperature, texture or vibration changes.

**Why use it:** Healing touch works with your personal energy field to support the body's own natural ability to heal.

**What to expect:** Healing touch can be practised while you are sitting, standing or lying down. Before beginning, the therapist may perform a meditation and then assess your energy field by observation and movements of the hands over the body.

**Evidence:** There is little evidence as studies have not been well designed, conducted or reported.



## Therapies using herbs and plants

Herbal remedies, also known as botanical medicine, have been used in many traditional medicine systems. They are produced from all parts of a plant including the roots, leaves, berries and flowers. These may contain active ingredients that can cause chemical changes in the body. Herbal remedies can be taken by mouth or applied to the skin to treat disease and promote health. Sometimes herbs and plants are categorised as biological treatments.

**Benefits:** Many scientific studies have examined the effects of various herbs on people with cancer. While some remedies have been shown to reduce side effects of cancer treatment, many remedies aren't supported by research.

**Side effects:** Some herbs may interact with conventional cancer treatment or medicines, and change how the treatment works or the dose is absorbed. Herbs taken in large quantities can be toxic. For more information on the effects of specific herbs and botanicals, visit the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center website at [mskcc.org](http://mskcc.org) and search for “herbs”. You can also download their About Herbs app from iTunes.

### Do herbs cure cancer?

There is no reliable scientific evidence that herbal remedies alone can cure or treat cancer. However, some plant extracts have been found to have anti-cancer effects and have been turned into chemotherapy drugs. These include vincristine from the periwinkle plant, and taxanes from the bark of the Pacific yew tree.

## Medical use of cannabis

Marijuana is a drug that comes from the cannabis plant. The main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol). THC is a type of cannabinoid. There are many other types of cannabinoids in marijuana. Cannabinoids are chemicals that act on certain receptors on cells in our body, especially cells in the central nervous system.

The potential benefits of cannabis and cannabinoids for symptom relief have been part of a number of government reviews and public debate in recent years. There is some evidence that cannabinoids can help people who have found conventional treatment unsuccessful for some symptoms and side effects. Examples of these include pain, nausea and vomiting.

It can also act as an appetite stimulant for people experiencing weight loss and muscle wasting. There is no scientific evidence that cannabis can treat cancer.

Marijuana is an illegal substance in Australia. However, the Australian government allows seriously ill people to access marijuana for medical reasons. This is commonly called medical marijuana.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration's Special Access Scheme allows eligible medical practitioners to apply to import and supply medicinal cannabis products. The laws about access to medical cannabis vary in each state and territory. These may affect whether you can be prescribed this substance in your area.

To find out more about access to cannabis for medical purposes, see [tga.gov.au/access-medicinal-cannabis-products](https://www.tga.gov.au/access-medicinal-cannabis-products).

## Western herbal medicine

**What it is:** Western herbal medicines are usually made from herbs traditionally grown in Europe and North America, but some come from Asia.

**Why use it:** Herbal medicines are often used to help with the side effects of conventional cancer treatments, such as lowering fatigue and improving wellbeing. Evidence shows they should be used in addition to conventional therapies, rather than as an alternative.

**What to expect:** After taking a case history, the practitioner puts together a holistic picture of your health. They will look for underlying reasons for your ill health or symptoms, and dispense a remedy addressing the causes and symptoms of your illness. They may give you a pre-made herbal formula or make up a blend of herbs specifically for your needs. Herbal medicines can be prepared as liquid extracts taken with water or as a tea (infusion), or as creams or tablets.

**Evidence:** There is a wide body of research into the effectiveness and safety of many herbs, and some studies show promising results. Speak to your doctor and herbal medicine practitioner about the potential side effects of any herbal preparations.

Many pharmacies and health food stores sell herbal preparations. Ask your complementary therapist or pharmacist if these are of high quality and meet Australian standards (see pages 14–15).





## Tips for using herbal products safely

- Buy or use herbal products from a qualified practitioner or reputable supplier.
- Ask for products that are clearly labelled in English with your name, batch number, date, quantity, dosage, directions, safety information (if applicable) and your practitioner's contact details.
- Avoid using over-the-counter products from a health food shop, pharmacy or the internet. Be aware that products from other countries that are sold over the internet are not covered by the same quality and safety regulations as those sold in Australia. Some Ayurvedic and Chinese products may contain lead, mercury and arsenic in high enough quantities to be considered toxic.
- Make sure you know how to prepare and take your herbs. Like conventional medicine, taking the correct dose at the right time is important for the herbal remedies to work safely.
- Talk to your doctor and complementary health practitioner, or call NPS MedicineWise's Medicines Line on **1300 633 424** from anywhere in Australia, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm AEST. This service is staffed by registered nurses who provide confidential, independent information about prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines.
- Ask the practitioner for ways to mask the taste of the herbs if you find them bitter.
- Report any suspected adverse reactions to any kind of medicine to your practitioner, or call the NPS MedicineWise Adverse Medicine Events Line on **1300 134 237** from anywhere in Australia, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm AEST. If the reaction is serious, call **000** or go to your nearest emergency department.

## Chinese herbal medicine

**What it is:** Chinese herbs are a key part of TCM. See pages 21–22 for more information on TCM. Different parts of plants, such as the leaves, roots, stems, flowers and seeds, are used. Herbs may be taken as tablets or given as tea.

**Why use it:** Herbs are given to unblock meridians, bring harmony between Yin and Yang, and restore organ function.

**What to expect:** The practitioner will take a case history and may do a tongue and pulse analysis to help them assess how your body is out of balance. They will choose a combination of herbs and foods to help bring your body back into balance. Chinese herbalists make a formula tailored specifically to your condition, or they can dispense prepackaged herbal medicines.

**Evidence:** As with Western herbal medicine, many Chinese herbs have been scientifically evaluated for how well they work for people with cancer. Studies have found benefits for some herbs, such as American ginseng for cancer-related fatigue. Research is continuing to examine the benefits of different herbs and different herbal combinations.

Chinese herbal medicine is a complex area and it's best to see an experienced practitioner rather than trying to treat yourself. Some herbs may interact with some cancer treatments and medicines, and cause side effects. See box opposite for tips on using herbs safely.

## Taking care with herbs during treatment

Although herbs are natural, they are not always safe. Taking the wrong dose or wrong combination or using the wrong part of the plant may cause side effects or be poisonous (toxic). Also, herbs used with chemotherapy, radiation therapy and hormone therapy can cause harmful interactions. All herbs should be prescribed by a qualified practitioner.

<b>St John's wort</b>	This popular herb for mild to moderate depression has been shown to stop some chemotherapy drugs and other medicines from working properly. It may also increase skin reactions to radiation therapy. If you are feeling depressed, ask your doctor about other treatments.
<b>Black cohosh</b>	Herbalists often prescribe this herb to menopausal women who are experiencing hot flashes. While clinical trials show that black cohosh is relatively safe, it should not be used by people with liver damage. There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of black cohosh in people with cancer.
<b>Ginkgo biloba and garlic</b>	Studies have shown that these may have a blood-thinning effect, which can cause bleeding. This could be harmful in people with low platelet levels (e.g. from chemotherapy) or who are having surgery.
<b>Green tea</b>	This has been shown to stop the cancer drug bortezomib (brand name Velcade) from working properly.

Keep your complementary therapists and other health professionals informed about any herbal remedies you use before, during or after cancer treatment. This information will help them give you the best possible care.



## Flower remedies

**What they are:** Also known as flower essences, these are highly diluted extracts from the flowers of wild plants. There are many types of flower remedies from around the world. The most well known in Australia are the Original Bach Flower Remedies, developed in the 1930s in England, and Australian Bush Flower Essences, developed in Australia in the 1980s.

**Why use them:** Flower remedies are used to balance the mind, body and spirit, and help you cope with emotional problems, which can sometimes contribute to poor health.

**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 they are helpful for reducing fear, anxiety or depression.

“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)*



# Therapies based on diet

It's common for people with cancer to have questions about what to eat during and after treatment. People often consider changing their diet to help their body cope with the effects of cancer and its treatments, and to give themselves the best chance of recovery. Some complementary therapies incorporate general dietary advice, while others have their own specific approaches to diet.

**Benefits:** Good nutrition before, during and after treatment can help you cope better with side effects, increase energy and maintain wellbeing. Vegetables and fruit contain vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals – natural substances such as antioxidants that may destroy cancer-causing agents (carcinogens). While it's best to get vitamins and minerals from eating whole foods, they are sometimes taken as supplements. If you were taking supplements before treatment, ask your oncologist if you can continue.

**Side effects:** Some people claim that a particular diet can cure or control cancer on its own. However, there are no special foods, diets or vitamin and mineral supplements that have been scientifically proven to do this.

Unproven diets, particularly those that suggest cutting out whole food groups, are likely to be low in energy (kilojoules/calories), protein, fat, iron, calcium, zinc and vitamins. Following one of these diets can cause unwanted weight loss and tiredness, and lower your immune function. Cutting out whole food groups and losing weight may also contribute to malnutrition. This may make it harder for you to cope with treatment and may slow down your recovery.

## Taking care with special diets during treatment

During treatment some people follow a restricted diet, which may stop them getting enough nutrients for their body to work properly.

<b>Gerson therapy</b>	<p>This involves drinking fresh juice several times a day, taking supplements, and having coffee enemas. There is no scientific evidence that Gerson therapy is an effective treatment for cancer, and evidence shows that coffee enemas can be dangerous if used excessively.</p>
<b>High doses of vitamins</b>	<p>Some people believe that taking high doses of certain vitamins will strengthen the body's immune system during cancer treatment. However, there is little evidence to support this claim. In fact, many vitamins and minerals can be toxic at high levels, and may affect how chemotherapy, radiation therapy and other medicines work.</p>
<b>Alkaline diet</b>	<p>This diet claims eating high alkaline foods such as green vegetables, fruits, oily fish and nuts lowers the acidity levels in the body. A low acid level is said to stop cancer growth, but there's no evidence to support this claim.</p>
<b>Macrobiotic diet</b>	<p>Generally, this diet consists of wholegrains, fruits and vegetables, and soups made with legumes and fermented soy (miso). This diet may cause you to lose weight. There is no evidence this diet cures cancer.</p>

Keep your complementary therapists and other health professionals informed about any special diets you try before, during or after cancer treatment. Being informed about your diet will help them give you the best possible care.

## Balanced diet

**What it is:** Cancer Council recommends people with cancer follow the Australian Dietary Guidelines ([eatforhealth.gov.au](http://eatforhealth.gov.au)), which give advice on what you need to eat and how much. The guidelines recommend eating a wide variety of foods from all five food groups every day:

- plenty of vegetables of different types and colours, and legumes/beans
- fruit
- grains, mostly wholegrains, such as breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley
- lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans
- milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives – mostly reduced fat.

**Why use it:** A balanced diet will help keep your body healthy and contribute to your wellbeing.

**What to expect:** For some people, it is not always possible to eat well during treatment. You can work with an Accredited Practising Dietitian who can ensure you meet your nutritional needs, give you tailored advice on your nutrition and coping with any eating problems you may experience, and assist in managing side effects.

**Evidence:** There is clinical evidence to show that eating a healthy, balanced diet can reduce people's cancer risk and help people recover from cancer treatment. For more information, call Cancer Council 13 11 20 for a copy of *Nutrition and Cancer*, or download a digital version from your local website.

## Getting help

A variety of practitioners can offer nutritional advice, and they can be described by many different terms. The term nutritionist refers to both qualified nutrition scientists and naturopathic nutritionists. Some dietitians also call themselves nutritionists. A nutritionist should have at least a diploma of nutrition, or equivalent, from a university or naturopathic college. An Accredited Practising Dietitian has a university qualification in science, nutrition and dietetics. See pages 70–71 for contact details.

## Naturopathic nutrition

**What it is:** This is part of a broad field of health care that focuses on the foods you eat and how they affect your health and wellbeing. This approach recognises the role of food as medicine and that the nutritional needs of each person are different.

**Why use it:** A diet tailored to your unique needs and your body's specific requirements may help you achieve optimal health.

**What to expect:** A naturopathic nutritionist develops a treatment plan that is focused on a diet of nutrient-rich food. You will be encouraged to avoid or limit artificial flavours and chemicals. You may also be prescribed specific herbs or supplements.

**Evidence:** Clinical evidence supports the use of a healthy diet for good health.



# Making informed decisions

Sometimes it is difficult to decide on the type of treatment to have. You may feel that everything is happening too fast. Discuss with your doctor how soon your treatment should start, and take as much time as you can before making a decision.

Understanding the disease, the available treatments and possible side effects can help you weigh up the pros and cons of different treatments and make a well-informed decision that's based on your personal values. You may also want to discuss the options with your doctor, complementary therapist, friends and family.

You have the right to accept or refuse any treatment offered. Some people with more advanced cancer choose treatment even if it offers only a small benefit for a short period of time. Others want to make sure the benefits outweigh the side effects so they have the best possible quality of life.

Deciding whether to use complementary therapies and which ones to choose is a similar process to deciding on a course of conventional treatment. Some people with cancer may feel pressure from friends and family to use complementary therapies, and may feel guilty if the therapy they choose doesn't offer any benefit.

Some people will consider complementary therapies at the time of their diagnosis; others will not think about using them until later, perhaps as part of their recovery or supportive care.

Cancer Council warns against delaying or replacing conventional treatment or medicine with a complementary or alternative therapy.

## Choosing a complementary therapy

### Weigh up the different types of therapies

- ✔ Think about what you expect to gain from using complementary therapies.
- ✔ Consider the possible side effects and safety issues of complementary therapies, how these might affect you, and how they may interact with your conventional treatments.
- ✔ Consider whether you prefer to use complementary therapies with strong scientific evidence, or whether anecdotal evidence is enough for you.
- ✔ Ask about how much the various therapies cost (see pages 65–66).

### Find out more about different therapies

- ✔ Gather information and consider whether it's accurate, up to date, and comes from a reliable source.
- ✔ Discuss the issue with your family and friends.
- ✔ Talk to other people who have tried these treatments, for example, at a support group or through Cancer Council Online Community – visit [cancercouncil.com.au/OC](http://cancercouncil.com.au/OC).
- ✔ Contact a natural therapy association to find practitioners in your area or to check their qualifications and experience (see pages 70–71).
- ✔ Borrow books from a library or read about therapies on recommended websites (see page 72).

### Discuss your concerns

- ✔ Talk to your practitioner or doctor about the therapies you would like to try, and whether there are any potential interactions or side effects when they are used with your conventional treatments.
- ✔ Seek a second opinion if you are not happy with the information you are given.

## Finding a complementary therapist

Contacting a professional association is a good starting point for finding a therapist (see pages 70–71). Your family or friends or support group may also be able to recommend a therapist. Some registered health professionals (e.g. doctors, nurses, pharmacists) are also qualified in a complementary therapy, such as nutritional and herbal medicine, hypnotherapy, counselling, acupuncture or massage. Some complementary therapies may be offered at cancer treatment centres, or your centre can recommend practitioners with experience treating people with cancer in your local area.



### What to consider when choosing a therapist

- Confirm that the therapist is willing to communicate with your doctors about your conventional treatment, especially if you are using remedies that may interfere with this treatment.
- Check whether the therapist would like to see a list of the medicines you're taking or your conventional treatment plan. This reduces the risk of them dispensing remedies or other treatments that might interact with your conventional medicines or treatments.
- Keep a record of the treatments given and medicines or supplements you have been prescribed.
- Write down any questions you have or use the question checklist on pages 73–76.
- Take someone with you to appointments to offer support, get involved in the discussion, take notes or simply listen.
- See the glossary on pages 77–83 if there is a word you don't understand.



## Can I help myself or should I see a professional?

One of the reasons people with cancer use complementary therapies is because it helps them take an active role in their health.

Some simple ways people can help themselves, without the guidance of a professional, include learning gentle massage or acupressure techniques, adding essential oils to their bath, meditating, or drinking herbal tea.

Some people may consider self-prescribing herbs or nutritional supplements. Although this may seem like a cheaper alternative, it may not be safe. The benefits of seeing a professional complementary therapist are that they:

- are qualified in the therapy or medicine you are considering
- have an objective view of your case
- have experience treating a range of conditions and may have treated other people with cancer
- are able to liaise with your clinicians, as necessary
- can prepare a tailor-made treatment plan and dispense remedies based on your individual needs, if they are qualified to do so
- can help you avoid the health risks of using complementary therapies that may interact with conventional cancer treatment.

Many websites sell a range of herbs or nutritional supplements that may be less expensive than those you can buy in Australia. However, products purchased from overseas are not covered by the same safety and quality regulations that apply to products sold in Australia. See pages 14–15 for more information.

## Telling your doctor about using a therapy

Studies show that most people with cancer who use complementary therapies don't tell their primary health care providers. This is because they worry their doctors will disapprove.

The use of complementary therapies is growing, so many primary health care providers are now better informed about them and are often supportive of their use. Some doctors and nurses have also been trained in complementary therapies and are able to give you information about them. Complementary therapies are also being offered by some cancer treatment centres.

To keep yourself safe, consider the following:

### **Talk to your doctor –**

It is important to discuss your interest or use of complementary therapies with your doctors and nurses, even

if they aren't supportive. It allows them to consider your safety and wellbeing.

For example, your surgeon, oncologist or radiation therapist may have specific concerns, such as not using particular creams or medicines at certain times during your treatment. If you are taking herbs or nutritional supplements, they may suggest you stop taking these before, during or after particular treatments.

### **Talk to your complementary health practitioner –**

It is also important to tell your complementary therapist that you have cancer, and inform them of the treatment or medicines you're having or taking. This can help you avoid any risky treatment and drug interactions.

## Talking with others

Aside from your doctor, you may want to discuss the different complementary therapies you're considering using with family or friends, a cancer support group or Cancer Council 13 11 20. Talking it over can help you sort out the course of action that best suits you.

## A second opinion

Just as you may want to get a second opinion from another specialist about your conventional cancer treatment and medicine, you might want to see a few different complementary therapists to compare how they would approach your treatment. After consulting with a complementary therapist, you may decide 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.

Getting a second opinion can be a valuable part of your overall decision-making process. It can help you feel comfortable about any complementary treatments you choose to have.

## Costs

Consultation costs for complementary therapies vary depending on the training and experience of the practitioner, the length of the consultation, and the treatment provided. The standard fee in 2018 for a private complementary health practitioner is about \$80 to \$140 per hour, which does not include the cost of herbal remedies, essential oils, nutritional supplements or other products.

Naturopaths, herbalists and homeopaths may dispense remedies that they mix for you, or they may sell you pre-made nutritional, herbal or homeopathic supplements. Prices vary depending on the type of remedy and the ingredients, strength and quantity. Consider speaking to a few practitioners to compare costs.

If you have private health insurance, check whether you are eligible for a rebate on the cost of the consultation with a complementary therapist. Most funds do not provide a rebate on the cost of any remedies or supplements that you purchase. Some complementary therapies can be claimed under Medicare if you have a referral from your GP as part of a Chronic Disease Management Plan.

## Taking part in a clinical trial

Funding for clinical trials or research into the effectiveness and safety of complementary therapies is limited. Because of the growing popularity of complementary therapies in Australia, the National Institute of Complementary Medicine was established by the federal government to promote research in this area of health care.

Some universities and hospitals are also involved in research and clinical trials. Your hospital or support group may provide opportunities for you to take part in clinical trials and research involving the use of complementary therapies.

Before deciding whether or not to join a clinical trial, discuss the questions on the following page with your doctor and a qualified complementary therapist.

- What treatments are being tested and why?
- What tests are involved?
- Can I take part in the trial while having conventional treatment?
- What are the possible risks or side effects?
- What are the possible benefits?
- 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?

If you join a clinical trial for conventional cancer treatment, it is important to check whether using any complementary therapies could impact on the trial results. Speak to your doctor and/or complementary therapist for information.

If you decide to take part in a clinical trial, you can withdraw at any time. For more information, call Cancer Council 13 11 20 or visit [australiancancertrials.gov.au](http://australiancancertrials.gov.au).

“ I was on a clinical trial when I decided to see a naturopath, who suggested I take coconut oil. The doctor on the trial said it shouldn't have an impact on my other medication. ” Alan (*multiple myeloma*)



# Caring for someone with cancer

You may be reading this booklet because you are caring for someone with cancer. Being a carer can be stressful and cause you much anxiety. Try to look after yourself – give yourself some time out, and share your worries and concerns with somebody neutral, such as a counsellor or your doctor.

Some of the complementary therapies described in this booklet may also help carers cope with stress and fatigue. Relaxation and meditation techniques can help carers maintain their energy levels and improve their quality of life. There are many useful apps available, and most are free to download.

Many cancer support groups and cancer education programs are open to carers, as well as people with cancer. Support groups and programs can offer valuable opportunities to share experiences and ways of coping.

There are also many groups and organisations that can provide you with information and support, such as Carers Australia, the national body representing carers in Australia. Carers Australia works with the Carers Associations in each of the states and territories. Phone 1800 242 636 or visit [carersaustralia.com.au](http://carersaustralia.com.au).



You can also call Cancer Council **13 11 20** to find out more about carers' services in your area and to get a free copy of the *Caring for Someone with Cancer* booklet. You can also listen to *The Thing About Cancer* podcast episode on carers.



# Cancer Council services

Cancer Council offers a range of services to support people affected by cancer, their families and friends.

**Cancer Council 13 11 20** – Trained professionals will answer any questions you have about your situation and link you to services in your local area (see inside back cover).

**Practical help** – Your local Cancer Council can help you find services or offer guidance to manage the practical impact of a cancer diagnosis. This may include access to transport and accommodation services.

**Legal and financial support** – If you need advice on legal or financial issues, Cancer Council can refer you to qualified professionals. Financial assistance may also be available. Call 13 11 20 to ask if you are eligible.

**Peer support services** – You might find it helpful to share your experiences with other people affected by cancer. Cancer Council can link you with individuals or support groups by phone, in person, or online. Call 13 11 20 or visit [cancercouncil.com.au/OC](http://cancercouncil.com.au/OC).

**Information resources** – Cancer Council produces easy-to-read booklets and fact sheets on more than 25 types of cancer, as well as treatments, emotional and practical issues, and recovery. Call 13 11 20 or visit your local Cancer Council website.

**Life after cancer** – Cancer Council offers support and information to people adjusting to life after cancer.



# Professional associations

The following associations represent practitioners across a range of complementary therapies in Australia. Contact them to learn more about the therapy and to find a practitioner.

Association	Contact details
<b>Association of Massage Therapists</b>	<b>02 9211 2441</b> amt.org.au
<b>Australasian Integrative Medicine Association</b>	<b>02 8011 3358</b> aima.net.au
<b>Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association</b>	<b>07 3457 1800</b> acupuncture.org.au
<b>Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association</b>	anzata.org
<b>Australian Feldenkrais Guild</b>	<b>1800 001 550</b> feldenkrais.org.au
<b>Australian Homoeopathic Association</b>	<b>07 4636 5081</b> homeopathyoz.org
<b>Australian Hypnotherapists Association</b>	<b>1300 55 22 54</b> ahahypnotherapy.org.au
<b>Australian Music Therapy Association</b>	<b>03 9525 9625</b> austmta.org.au
<b>Australian Natural Therapists Association</b>	<b>1800 817 577</b> australiannaturaltherapists association.com.au
<b>Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association</b>	<b>1800 422 885</b> anpa.asn.au
<b>Australian Physiotherapy Association</b>	<b>1300 306 622</b> physiotherapy.asn.au



<b>Association</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
<b>Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique</b>	<b>1300 788 540</b> austat.org.au
<b>Australian Traditional-Medicine Society</b>	<b>1800 456 855</b> atms.com.au
<b>Bowen Therapists Federation of Australia</b>	<b>1300 426 936</b> bowen.asn.au
<b>Dietitians Association of Australia</b>	<b>1800 812 942</b> daa.asn.au
<b>Exercise &amp; Sports Science Australia</b>	<b>07 3171 3335</b> essa.org.au
<b>International Aromatherapy and Aromatic Medicine Association</b>	<b>0438 511 415</b> iaama.org.au
<b>Laughter Yoga Australia</b>	<b>0408 552 269</b> laughteryoga-australia.org
<b>Massage &amp; Myotherapy Australia</b>	<b>1300 138 872</b> massagemyotherapy.com.au
<b>Naturopaths &amp; Herbalists Association of Australia</b>	<b>02 9797 2244</b> nhaa.org.au
<b>Oncology Massage Training</b>	oncologymassagetraining.com.au
<b>Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia</b>	<b>03 9486 3077</b> pacfa.org.au
<b>Reflexology Association of Australia</b>	<b>1300 733 711</b> reflexology.org.au
<b>Reiki Australia</b>	<b>1300 66 47 80</b> reikiaustralia.com.au
<b>Yoga Australia</b>	<b>1300 881 451</b> yogaaustralia.org.au



# Useful websites

You can find many useful resources online, but not all websites are reliable. These websites are good sources of information.

## Australian

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Cancer Council Australia .....	<b>cancer.org.au</b>
Cancer Australia .....	<b>canceraustralia.gov.au</b>
beyondblue.....	<b>beyondblue.org.au</b>
Cancer Council Online Community .....	<b>cancercouncil.com.au/OC</b>
Carers Australia .....	<b>carersaustralia.com.au</b>
Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency .....	<b>ahpra.gov.au</b>
Australian Register of Homoeopaths .....	<b>aroh.com.au</b>
Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists .....	<b>aronah.org</b>
National Institute of Complementary Medicine .....	<b>nicm.edu.au</b>
Therapeutic Goods Administration.....	<b>tga.gov.au</b>

## International

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American Cancer Society.....	<b>cancer.org</b>
Cancer Research UK.....	<b>cancerresearchuk.org</b>
Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Cancer (Europe).....	<b>cam-cancer.org</b>
Macmillan Cancer Support (UK).....	<b>macmillan.org.uk</b>
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (US).....	<b>mskcc.org</b>
National Cancer Institute (US) .....	<b>cancer.gov</b>
National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (US) .....	<b>nccih.nih.gov</b>
Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database (US) .....	<b>naturaldatabase.therapeuticresearch.com</b>
Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (US).....	<b>cam.cancer.gov</b>
Society for Integrative Oncology (US) .....	<b>integrativeonc.org</b>



# Question checklist

You may find these questions helpful when thinking about what to ask your complementary therapist and doctor.

## Things to consider before using a complementary therapy

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- What are the benefits?
- What is the scientific evidence to support its use?
- Will the therapy potentially harm me because of:
  - its side effects?
  - possible interaction with other medicines?
  - the therapist's advice to stop or delay conventional treatment?
- Can I afford the cost of the therapy or medicines?

## General questions to ask any potential complementary therapist

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- 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?
- What exactly is the therapy? How does it work?
- How long will it take to work?
- How can the therapy you practise help me?
- Are there any specific precautions I should take?
- Has the therapy been tested in clinical trials? Have the findings been published, and are they available to read?
- Can this therapy be combined with conventional cancer treatment and medicines?

- Do you expect me to stop my conventional medicines and treatments?
- Are you willing to liaise with my doctors or any other health professionals I may need to see?
- How long should I use this therapy for? 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? Can I claim the cost on Medicare or from my health fund?
- What can I expect during a consultation?
- How many consultations do you recommend, and how often?
- Do you dispense your own medicines 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?
- What side effects may occur?

## General questions to ask your doctor

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- Are you familiar with complementary therapies or medicines?
- Do you have any qualifications in complementary therapies?
- Are there any complementary therapies you think might help me?
- Would you be happy for me to use complementary therapies? If not, what should I do if I decide to use complementary therapies?
- Do you know whether the complementary medicines I am taking or wish to take will interfere with any of my treatments?

- Would you be willing to guide me in my research or choice of complementary therapies?
- Would you be willing to talk to my complementary therapists?
- Can you recommend any complementary therapists?

## Questions to ask about specific therapies

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### Mind–body techniques

- What type of therapist would you recommend for my concerns?
- Can you refer me to a psychologist or counsellor?

### Body-based practices

- Are there any forms of massage or bodywork that would help me?
- Are there any forms of massage or bodywork I shouldn't have?
- Can I have acupuncture before and/or after surgery, chemotherapy or radiation therapy?
- Are there any areas on my body where a massage therapist or acupuncturist needs to take special care?
- What precautions, if any, should I take?
- Would I be able to participate in tai chi, qi gong or yoga?
- What level of exercise intensity would be suitable for me?
- Can you provide me with a letter giving your approval for me to have massage or other bodywork therapy?
- Should I see an exercise physiologist or physiotherapist?

### Energy therapies

- Do you think using reiki or healing touch would benefit me?
- Will I have any side effects from any types of energy therapies?

### **Therapies based on diet**

- Are there any general dietary changes I should make?
- Should I eat organic foods?
- Are there any vitamin or mineral supplements that will help manage specific side effects caused by conventional treatment?
- Should I be taking any particular nutritional supplements?
- 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?

### **Therapies using herbs and plants**

- Are there any herbs you would recommend during or after cancer treatment?
- What dosage should I take? Does it have side effects?
- Are there any herbs I shouldn't take because of my medicines, surgery or other conventional treatments?
- If I use herbal medicine, when should I take it in relation to my other medicines or conventional treatments? Is it okay to use at the same time or should I take it at a different time?
- Do you think using flower remedies or homeopathy would benefit me?
- Will I have any side effects from homeopathy remedies?



# Glossary

## **active ingredient**

The compound in a medicine that works on the body.

## **acupressure**

An ancient technique that is similar to acupuncture. It involves applying pressure to specific points on the body to unblock energy.

## **acupuncture**

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

## **Alexander technique**

A method of realigning posture.

## **alternative therapy**

A therapy that is used in place of a conventional treatment, often in the hope that it will provide a cure.

## **anecdotal evidence**

Evidence based on personal experience that has not been scientifically tested.

## **aromatherapy**

The use of essential oils extracted from plants to improve a person's mood and physical symptoms.

## **art therapy**

The use of art to help people express their feelings.

## **Ayurvedic medicine**

A traditional medical system from India. It aims to balance the body's systems using diet, herbal medicine, massage, meditation and yoga.

## **base oil**

An oil used in aromatherapy or massage that allows the therapist to

work over the skin easily. Also known as carrier oil.

## **biochemical function**

The way the body works internally. Medicines, including drugs, herbs and dietary supplements, affect internal functioning, just as food does.

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

A range of therapies that involve touching the body or the energy field surrounding the body.

## **botanical medicine**

See herbal medicine.

## **Bowen therapy**

A non-invasive bodywork technique involving light hand movements over the body to release tension.

## **bush medicine**

Remedies and ways of healing used traditionally by Aboriginal people.

## **cannabinoid**

A chemical in marijuana that acts on certain cells in the body. The main active ingredient is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

## **cannabis**

The dried leave and flowering tops of the cannabis plant. Cannabis contains active chemicals called cannabinoid. Also called marijuana.

## **chemotherapy**

The use of 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.

**clinical trial**

A research study that tests new and better treatments to improve people's health.

**coffee enema**

An alternative therapy that involves inserting coffee into the anus to open the bowels, cleanse the colon and remove toxins from the body.

**cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)**

A common type of counselling that helps people change how they respond to negative situations or emotions by identifying unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

**complementary therapy**

A supportive treatment used with conventional treatment to improve general health, wellbeing and quality of life. Helps people cope with cancer symptoms and treatment side effects.

**conventional cancer treatment**

Scientifically proven treatments for cancer, including surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy and pharmaceutical medicines.

**counselling**

Helping someone discuss and resolve issues by listening to them.

**dietary supplement**

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

**dietitian**

A university-qualified health professional who supports and educates people about nutrition

and diet. Also known as Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD).

**Eastern medicine**

A broad term for therapies that began in Asian countries like China, Japan and India. These therapies are generally not based on scientific evidence but have been used for centuries.

**energy (kilojoules or calories)**

Energy is counted in kilojoules or calories and provides fuel for daily activities. Energy is obtained from food and drink.

**energy field**

Vital energy or life force called qi. Energy is believed to surround the body in an energy field, as well as running along invisible meridians inside the body.

**energy therapies**

Therapies based on the concept of energy or vital force surrounding and running through the body.

**essential oil**

Aromatic oil extracted from different parts of a plant, such as seeds, bark, flowers and leaves.

**evidence-based**

Treatments that have been tested scientifically and shown to be beneficial over and over again.

**exercise physiologist**

A university-trained professional who specialises in using exercise as medicine, particularly for people with medical conditions. Also known as Accredited Exercise Physiologist (AEP).



**Feldenkrais**

A system of gentle movements that encourage self-awareness to improve movement and posture.

**flower remedies**

Natural medicines extracted from flowers and diluted several times so that no active ingredient remains. Also known as flower essences.

**Gerson therapy/Gerson diet**

An alternative nutritional therapy based on pure fruit and vegetable juices and coffee enemas to detoxify the body.

**guided imagery**

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

**healing touch**

The use of soft touch or passing hands over the body to restore harmony and balance by working with the flow of vital energy in the body.

**herb**

A part of a plant, such as leaves, flowers, roots or berries.

**herbal medicine**

The use of herbs taken by mouth or applied to the body to treat and prevent illness, and to strengthen the body. Also known as botanical medicine.

**homeopathy**

Based on the idea of treating “like with like”. Treats disease with very small amounts of natural substances that in larger amounts would produce symptoms of the disease.

**holistic health care**

Health care that assesses the causes and effects of disease, and the way the different systems of the body impact on each other.

**hormone therapy**

A treatment that blocks the body’s natural hormones, which sometimes help cancer grow. It is used when the cancer is growing in response to hormones.

**hypnotherapy**

A type of counselling. The practitioner induces a deep relaxation to allow the patient’s subconscious (inner) mind to communicate its thoughts with their conscious (aware) mind.

**immunotherapy**

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

**infusion**

A herbal remedy prepared by steeping dried herbs in hot or boiling water. Also known as herbal tea.

**integrative oncology**

The combined use of evidence-based complementary therapies and conventional medicine. Also known as integrative medicine.

**life coaching**

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

**lifestyle factors**

Factors that help give a holistic

(well-rounded) picture of your health and wellbeing. These include what you eat and drink; how much you exercise; your occupation and its risks; relationships; stress and pressures in your life; and whether you smoke.

#### **liquid extract**

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

#### **lymph**

A clear fluid that circulates around the body through the lymphatic system, carrying cells that fight infection.

#### **lymphatic drainage**

A type of specialised massage designed to stimulate the flow of lymph in the body's tissues.

#### **lymphatic system**

A network of tissues, capillaries, vessels, ducts and nodes that removes excess fluid from tissues, absorbs fatty acids, transports fat, and produces immune cells.

#### **lymphoedema**

Swelling caused by a build-up of fluid. This happens when lymph vessels or nodes don't drain properly.

#### **massage**

A bodywork therapy in which muscles are stimulated, stretched and relaxed through specialised pressure.

#### **meditation**

A mind-body technique that focuses on breathing, learning to still the mind, and thinking only about the present.

#### **meridian**

An invisible energy channel in the body. In traditional Chinese medicine, the body is believed to have meridians through which vital energy called qi flows to keep people balanced and healthy.

#### **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.

#### **mindfulness meditation**

A type of meditation based on the concept of being "mindful". This means paying attention to the present.

#### **mineral oil**

A highly processed and refined colourless and odourless oil used by some massage therapists.

#### **minerals**

Components of food that are needed to keep the body healthy, e.g. iron, zinc and calcium.

#### **music therapy**

The use of music to improve health and wellbeing.

#### **naturopathic nutrition**

A form of nutrition based on the principles of naturopathy. Specific foods are chosen to correct problems in the digestive system and to enhance digestion and absorption of nutrients.

#### **naturopathy**

A holistic system of health care incorporating diet, bodywork and herbal medicine to stimulate the body's own healing system.

**needles/press needles**

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

**nutrition**

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

**oncologist**

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

**palliative care**

The holistic care of people who have a life-limiting illness, their families and carers. It aims to improve quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, spiritual, social and practical needs. It is not just for people who are about to die, although end-of-life care is a part of palliative care.

**peripheral neuropathy**

Weaknesses, numbness, tingling or pain, usually in the hands and feet, caused by damage to the nerves that are located away from the brain and spinal cord (peripheral nerves). This can be caused by chemotherapy.

**physiotherapist**

A university-trained professional who treats injury, disease or disability with physical methods such as massage and exercise.

**phytochemicals**

Chemical compounds that occur naturally in fruit, vegetables, legumes (beans and peas) and grains. Also called phytonutrients.

**Pilates**

A system of exercises that increase awareness of muscles in the body to improve breathing, core strength and posture.

**polarity therapy**

A gentle bodywork technique using touch to clear blockages in energy flow around the body.

**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.

**psychological techniques**

See mind–body techniques.

**qi**

Vital energy or force. Pronounced “chee”.

**qi gong**

A form of movement therapy from traditional Chinese medicine. Pronounced “chee goong”.

**quality of life**

Your comfort and satisfaction, based on how well your physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual, social and financial needs are met within the limitations of your illness.

**radiation therapy**

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

**reflexology**

A type of massage of areas on the hands and feet known as “reflex

points". These points are believed to correspond with the body's internal organs and systems.

#### **reiki**

A system of light or no-touch movements that may turn blocked negative energy into positive energy.

**relaxation (relaxation techniques)**  
Different techniques used to reduce muscle tension and stress. Examples include relaxation, meditation, guided imagery or visualisation.

#### **resistance training (strength training)**

A type of exercise using free weights, special elastic resistance bands, medicine balls, weight machines, or your own body weight to help strengthen muscles.

#### **scientific evidence**

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

#### **side effect**

Unintended effects of a drug, herb or other treatment.

#### **spiritual practices**

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.

Also called spirituality.

#### **supportive care**

All forms of care and support that aim to improve the quality of life of people living with cancer, their family and carers.

#### **tai chi**

Part of traditional Chinese medicine, this exercise technique incorporates coordinated body movement, breathing techniques and meditation to create stability in the body.

#### **therapeutic touch**

A bodywork technique where the practitioner's soothing touch calms the body by restoring the flow of energy.

#### **touch therapies**

See body-based practices.

#### **traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)**

A broad system of holistic health care originating in Asia. It is based on the belief that vital energy known as qi flows through the body's meridians (channels). This keeps a person's spiritual, emotional and physical health in balance. TCM includes therapies 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. Medical practitioners may use the term to mean mainstream (conventional) 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**

Guided imagery.

### vital force (vital energy)

The life force within the body that contributes to people's health and wellbeing. It is stimulated by nourishing foods or medicines, mind-body techniques and body-based practices.

### vitamins

Essential substances found in food. The body needs vitamins 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 to address a range of symptoms.

### whole medical systems

Complete systems of theory and practice that have evolved in different cultures. Includes naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine and homeopathy.

### Yin and Yang

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

### yoga

An exercise technique originating from India that focuses on breathing, stretching, strengthening and relaxation. There are many different types of yoga.

### Can't find a word here?

For more cancer-related words, visit:

- [cancercouncil.com.au/words](http://cancercouncil.com.au/words)
- [cancervic.org.au/glossary](http://cancervic.org.au/glossary)
- [cancersa.org.au/glossary](http://cancersa.org.au/glossary)

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## How you can help

At Cancer Council, we're dedicated to improving cancer control. As well as funding millions of dollars in cancer research every year, we advocate for the highest quality care for cancer patients and their families. We create cancer-smart communities by educating people about cancer, its prevention and early detection. We offer a range of practical and support services for people and families affected by cancer. All these programs would not be possible without community support, great and small.

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

**Make a donation:** Any gift, large or small, makes a meaningful contribution to our work in supporting people with cancer and their families now and in the future.

**Buy Cancer Council sun protection products:** Every purchase helps you prevent cancer and contribute financially to our goals.

**Help us speak out for a cancer-smart community:** We are a leading advocate for cancer prevention and improved patient services. You can help us speak out on important cancer issues and help us improve cancer awareness by living and promoting a cancer-smart lifestyle.

**Join a research study:** Cancer Council funds and carries out research investigating the causes, management, outcomes and impacts of different cancers. You may be able to join a study.

To find out more about how you, your family and friends can help, please call your local Cancer Council.



# Cancer Council

## 13 11 20

Being diagnosed with cancer can be overwhelming. At Cancer Council, we understand it isn't just about the treatment or prognosis. Having cancer affects the way you live, work and think. It can also affect our most important relationships.

When disruption and change happen in our lives, talking to someone who understands can make a big difference. Cancer Council has been providing information and support to people affected by cancer for over 50 years.

Calling 13 11 20 gives you access to trustworthy information that is relevant to you. Our cancer nurses are available to answer your questions and link you to services in your area, such as transport, accommodation and home help. We can also help with other matters, such as legal and financial advice.

If you are finding it hard to navigate through the health care system, or just need someone to listen to your immediate concerns, call 13 11 20 and find out how we can support you, your family and friends.

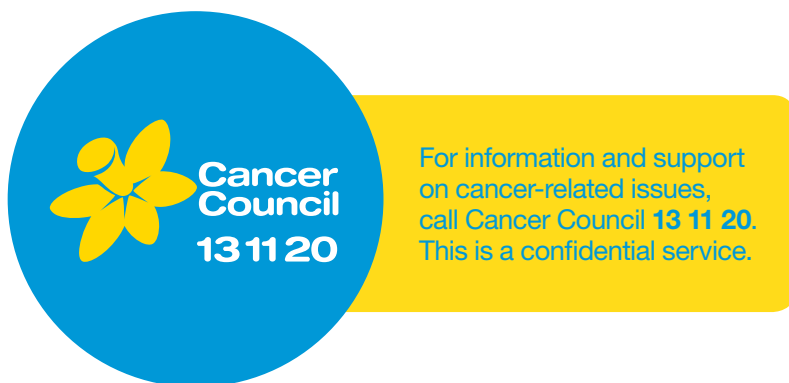
Cancer Council services and programs vary in each area.

13 11 20 is charged at a local call rate throughout Australia (except from mobiles).



**If you need information in a language other than English, an interpreting service is available. Call 13 14 50.**

**If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can contact us through the National Relay Service. [www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)**



## Visit your local Cancer Council website

**Cancer Council ACT**  
actcancer.org

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**Cancer Council NT**  
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**Cancer Council Queensland**  
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**Cancer Council Tasmania**  
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