During your cancer journey you may hear about, or become interested in, complementary therapies. There are many therapies on offer and information about these can be confusing. This fact sheet will help you to make informed and safe choices.

What are conventional cancer therapies?
These are treatments that are evidence based and scientifically proven to be safe and effective. They are designed to diagnose and treat cancer, slow its growth, or provide relief from symptoms. The main conventional treatments are surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and immunotherapy. They are often referred to as mainstream or conventional medical treatments.

What are complementary therapies?
Complementary therapies may be used together with conventional medical treatments to support and enhance your quality of life and well-being. They do not aim to cure the person’s cancer. Instead they are used to help control symptoms such as pain and fatigue. Complementary therapies include relaxation, talking therapies, meditation, visualisation, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, music therapy, art therapy and massage.

Some complementary therapies may not be recommended during your treatment as they interfere with your treatment and/or worsen side-effects. Always talk to your doctor before commencing any complementary therapy.

What are alternative therapies?
Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional medical treatments. Alternative therapies are often promoted as “cancer cures” but they are unproven and have not been scientifically tested. They may cause harm or suffering to those who use them instead of conventional medical treatments. Examples of alternative therapies include naturopathy, immune therapy, homeopathy, Chinese herbs and megavitamins.

What complementary therapies help cancer patients?
The following complementary therapies are those most often used by people with cancer.

- **Mind body therapies** are designed to enhance the mind’s capacity to affect the body’s function and symptoms and include meditation, guided imagery and hypnosis.
- **Talking therapies** offer emotional support. This can be one-on-one with a trained counsellor, or in a group of people who come together to share their experiences and support each other. There are also “peer support” programs that connect you or your family member with a trained volunteer who has had a similar experience.
- **Lifestyle approaches** such as a healthy diet and regular exercise may help you feel better or help to relieve symptoms such as fatigue.

Considering a complementary therapy?
Find out as much information as you can about the therapy by asking questions such as:

- Is this therapy specifically used for cancer patients or for people with other diseases?
- Are there any side-effects?
- Who will be involved in delivering the therapy?
- What are their qualifications and are they registered with a professional organisation?
- What are the costs of the therapy and are they covered by my health insurance provider?
- What does the therapy aim to achieve?
- Will this therapy affect my conventional medical treatment?

You should always feel safe, comfortable and respected when undertaking any form of complementary therapy. Your state or territory Cancer Council may offer a range of complementary therapies and answer any questions you have.

Remember, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact your doctor.

Where can I get reliable information?
**Cancer Council 13 11 20**
Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

**Cancer Council Australia website**
www.cancer.org.au