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CANCER SUPPORT

A practical guide to living with and after cancer

CANCER AND COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES



About this booklet

This booklet is about complementary therapies. There are many different types of therapy. This booklet is about the most common ones used by some people with cancer. We hope it gives you a balanced view of what's available and what's involved if you decide to try one.

We can't advise you about the best treatment for you. This information can only come from your doctor, who knows your full medical history. It is important to tell your cancer doctor if you are thinking of having, or are having, any complementary or alternative therapy. Always let your therapist know that you have cancer.

You might be advised not to have complementary therapies. This is because it isn't safe to have them if you have a certain type of cancer or if you are having certain treatments. Your healthcare team will be able to give you more information about this.

For more information

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these, visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

How to use this booklet

The booklet is split into sections to help you find what you need. You don't have to read it from start to finish. You can use the contents list on the following page to help you.

We have included quotes from people who have tried complementary therapies, which you may find helpful. Some are from the website **healthtalk.org** Others are from people who have chosen to share their story with us and members of our online community at **macmillan.org.uk/community**

We have highlighted safety issues for you to remember in green boxes throughout this booklet.

On pages 77–81, you'll find contact details for organisations that hold registers of complementary therapists.

We have more advice on getting information about complementary therapies and choosing a therapist on pages 13–15. The contact details are a guide for you to find more information but we are not able to recommend any particular organisation.

If you want to write down notes or questions for your healthcare team, there is space on page 85.

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ABOUT COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

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Understanding different terms

We use the terms **conventional medical treatment**, **complementary therapies** and **alternative therapies** throughout this booklet, so it is helpful to explain what they mean.

Conventional medical treatments

These are the medical treatments doctors use to treat people with cancer. Surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormonal therapies and targeted therapies are all conventional medical treatments.

Many cancers are cured with these treatments. Even when treatments are unable to cure cancer, they often help people live for longer or reduce their symptoms.

Conventional medical treatments for cancer are scientifically tested and researched. This means we know how safe and effective they are, and if they have side effects. This is called **evidence-based medicine**.

Complementary therapies

These are generally used alongside, or in addition to, conventional medical treatments. Complementary therapists don't claim that they can treat or cure cancer. People generally use complementary therapies to boost their physical or emotional health. Sometimes they may be used to relieve symptoms or the side effects of conventional medical treatments.

Sometimes complementary therapy is combined with conventional medicine. This is called **integrated** or **integrative medicine**.

Some complementary therapies have been tested in the same way as conventional medical treatments. This is to see how effective and safe they are, and to see if they have side effects.

There is more information about complementary therapies on pages 8–47.

Alternative therapies

These are often grouped together with complementary therapies but there are important differences between the two. A single type of therapy can be complementary if it is used in one way and alternative if used in another. Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional medical treatments.

Some alternative therapies claim to treat or even to cure cancer. But no alternative therapies have been proven to cure cancer or slow its growth.

Alternative therapies don't go through the same evidence-based testing as conventional medical treatments. Some may even be harmful.

Using an alternative therapy instead of conventional cancer treatment could reduce the chances of curing someone's cancer or of living for longer with it.

There is more information about alternative therapies on pages 55–69.

Why people use complementary therapies

Doctors, nurses and complementary therapists have researched some complementary therapies in trials. Some results showed that certain therapies helped to relieve particular cancer symptoms or treatment side effects. Other results showed no effect on symptoms or side effects. But the therapies researched were found to be safe and most people who tried them found them very supportive.

Complementary therapists usually work with the person as a whole. They don't just work with the part of the body where the cancer is. This is called a **holistic approach**. Health and social care professionals, such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists, also aim to take a holistic approach.

There are many reasons why people choose to use complementary therapies. Some people find that they help them cope with the stresses of cancer and its treatments. Many therapies are relaxing and may lift your spirits when you aren't feeling your best.

Some people say the relationship they develop with their complementary therapist is an added benefit. Having someone who listens to you may help you cope with difficult feelings.

Finding support for yourself in this way can help you feel more in control. Some people may also see complementary therapies as a positive thing to do for their general well-being.

Some complementary therapies are done in a group. This may be a good opportunity to meet other people with similar experiences in a positive setting.

'It was important for me to feel I was actively doing something to make myself as prepared as I could be for the treatment.'

John

Complementary therapies may help you:

- feel better and improve your quality of life
- feel less stressed, tense and anxious
- sleep better
- with some of your cancer symptoms
- with some of the side effects of your cancer treatment
- feel more in control.

Choosing a complementary therapy

When choosing a complementary therapy, it can help to think about:

- what you would like to do
- how it may benefit you
- any safety issues
- how much it costs.

You can read more about the possible benefits of different therapies in the following sections of this booklet. On pages 77–81 there are details of organisations where you can find out more about individual complementary therapies.

If you would like to know what other people have found helpful, you can contact a local cancer support group. Or if you have internet access, you can join an online community. Support groups and online communities make it possible for people affected by cancer to give and get support. People can share their experiences of all aspects of their treatment, including complementary therapies. You can join our online community at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community) and find a support group near you at [macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups)

You can also read interviews with people who have tried complementary therapies at [healthtalk.org](https://www.healthtalk.org)

Your preferences

To decide what feels right for you, it may help to think about what you want from the complementary therapy.

You may want to:

- feel more relaxed
- get help with symptoms or side effects
- get help with difficult emotions
- feel generally better
- make a positive lifestyle change.

There are some other things to think about:

- What is available in your area?
- Are treatments free or, if you have to pay, how much can you afford?
- Do you want a one-off treatment or something to do regularly?

'Complementary therapies to me mean a bit of indulgence, massage, "me time".'

Pat

Safety

Doctors don't usually have a problem with their patients using complementary therapies. But some therapies may not be suitable if you have a particular cancer or are having certain treatments.

Before using a complementary therapy, talk to your cancer healthcare team. Find out if it could have any harmful effects for you. It is very important to check whether it could interact with your cancer treatment, make it less effective or increase side effects.

As you read this booklet, look for safety issues that we've highlighted in green boxes like this one. We can't advise you about the best treatment for you. This information can only come from your doctor.

If you are already having complementary therapy before you start conventional treatment, make sure you tell your cancer doctor or nurse, especially if you are taking herbs, pills or medicines.

If you are using a complementary therapy, it is very important to tell the complementary therapist you have cancer.

It is important to avoid any therapist who claims to treat, prevent or cure cancer. No reputable therapist would do this and these types of claims are not backed up by medical evidence.

Cost

Some complementary therapies are provided free by the NHS and some larger cancer charities. Ask your doctor or nurse if there are complementary therapies at your hospital, hospice or GP surgery. Some cancer support groups offer therapies free of charge or at a reduced cost.

Therapies that aren't provided by the NHS, cancer support charities or support groups can be expensive. The costs can add up over a long period of time. Check the costs beforehand and make sure you are being fairly charged. Some private therapists may offer a reduced cost based on your ability to pay. The organisations listed on page 77 should be able to give you an idea of the usual costs of certain complementary therapies.

Getting information

Before making any decisions, make sure you have all the information you need about the complementary therapy you are interested in. Talk about it with your cancer doctor or nurse.

Ask to have a consultation with a complementary therapist first to find out what they think their therapy can do for you. There are some tips on choosing a therapist and suggestions of what to ask them on page 15.

You may find it helpful to take a relative or friend with you for support. It can also help to write down the questions that matter most to you beforehand. There is space for you to write any questions you'd like to ask on page 85. Take your time to decide whether you want to go ahead with the therapy.

The Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** can give you more information on complementary and alternative therapies. They can also help you find a suitable therapist or a support group offering complementary therapy services in your area.

You can also get information from library books and online. Be careful when choosing what to read or believe on the internet. Some websites make claims that aren't backed up by evidence and others may be selling products for profit.

Choosing a complementary therapist

There are several organisations in the UK that have registers of complementary therapists. Therapists volunteer to join the register, as registration is not compulsory. The organisations ask that members have met a national standard of practice. They may have a quality mark displayed on a certificate of qualification, or in their place of work. This is different to the way doctors and nurses are registered in the UK. Doctors and nurses must also meet a national standard of practice but it is regulated by law.

These organisations will be able to provide you with a list of registered therapists. You can find contact details for these on page 77. There are also details of organisations for specific therapies on pages 77–81.



When choosing a therapist, you should:

- remember that some health professionals, such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists, are trained in complementary therapies – so it is worth checking what services your hospital provides first
- always use a qualified therapist who belongs to a professional body – ask the organisation about the level of qualification their therapists have
- check if the organisation has a code of practice and ethics, and a disciplinary and complaints procedure
- ask how many years of training they have had and how long they have been practising
- ask what training they have done around complementary therapies and cancer
- ask if they have indemnity insurance (in case of harm from complementary therapy side effects)
- be careful not to be misled by false promises – no trustworthy therapist would ever claim to be able to cure cancer.

‘Near to where I live is a lovely cancer support centre. Not only do they offer a range of complementary therapies, 12 of which are free, they also offer counselling. They do yoga and go walking. You can even just drop in for lunch and a chat.’

Ann

'I was really cynical about the effect it would have. They really listened, and showed genuine empathy and care. I felt as though I had come back in from the cold.'

Terry



TYPES OF THERAPY

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Types of complementary therapy

There are many types of complementary therapy. Some are based on traditional medical systems outside of western medicine, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine or Indian Ayurvedic Medicine.

Therapies can be grouped in different ways and some may fit into more than one group. The main groups are:

- mind-body therapies (see pages 19–25)
- massage therapy (see pages 26–28)
- energy-based therapies (see pages 29–32)
- physical therapies (see pages 33–37)
- therapies using herbs and plants (see pages 38–42)
- therapies using supplements or diet (see pages 43–47).

'After I was diagnosed with cancer, I found it an enormous relief to be able to talk to someone about my feelings. I was also given access to complementary therapies, which really relaxed me at a time when I was feeling particularly stressed.'

Maureen

Mind-body therapies

This section discusses some of the most popular and widely available mind-body complementary therapies used by people with cancer in the UK. These are:

- relaxation
- visualisation (mental imagery)
- meditation
- hypnotherapy
- art therapy
- music therapy.

Mind-body therapies are based on the belief that what we think and feel can affect our well-being. Like all other complementary or alternative therapies, they have no effect on the cancer. But they are often given as part of support for people with cancer.

Mind-body therapies are available in many conventional cancer treatment centres. They may help you feel less anxious, improve your mood and help you sleep. They can also be used to ease symptoms, such as pain, or to reduce side effects caused by cancer treatment.

Most mind-body techniques need to be practised regularly for you to get the best results. Many people find that going to group classes helps them stay motivated to practise the techniques.

Some NHS services and support groups offer mind-body therapies. You can ask if your hospital provides them or if you can access them through your GP. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** for details of support groups in your area.

Relaxation

Simple breathing and relaxation exercises can help reduce anxiety and stress. As well as calming your mind, they may also reduce muscle tension. This may have a positive effect on the parts of the nervous system that control blood pressure and the digestive system. Relaxation is sometimes used together with meditation (see page 22) and visualisation.

Almost everyone can use relaxation techniques. You can learn them as part of a group, or at home using a CD or podcast.

There is a list of organisations that provide relaxation CDs on pages 78–79.

Visualisation (mental imagery)

Visualisation involves creating images in your mind while you are in a state of relaxation or meditation. For example, you might imagine that:

- you are lying in a field full of beautiful flowers
- you are healthy and strong
- the sun is shining on you, warming you and giving you strength.

The theory is that by imagining a peaceful scene, you will feel more relaxed. Various studies are looking at whether visualisation can benefit people with cancer. Some studies have found that in women having treatment for breast cancer their mood's improved when using visualisation. Other research has shown that, for some people, it can reduce the symptoms of cancer or the side effects of treatment.

Relaxation and meditation



Meditation

Meditation uses concentration or reflection to deeply relax and calm the mind. This can help reduce feelings of fear, pain, anxiety and depression.

Regular meditation practice can help people feel more in control of themselves and their lives. Many studies have shown that regular meditation lowers blood pressure and reduces the pulse rate. It can also reduce anxiety and stress levels.

You can use CDs or podcasts to meditate at home. Some people find it helpful to meditate in a group until they are familiar with the technique.

You can ask your GP or hospital doctor if they offer meditation, or check with one of the complementary therapy organisations on page 77.

Meditation may not be suitable for people who have mental health problems. If you have, or have had a mental illness, it is important to get advice from your doctor before considering meditation.

Hypnotherapy

Many people use hypnotherapy to help them make positive lifestyle changes, such as giving up smoking. It might also be used to encourage positive emotions, such as calmness and relaxation.

Some studies have shown that hypnotherapy has helped reduce some side effects of cancer treatment, such as nausea and vomiting. Some other studies have shown it can help with pain. But there isn't enough reliable evidence for doctors to recommend it as the main treatment for these problems.

A hypnotherapist will work with you to create a helpful state of mind, during which you will still be aware of your surroundings. The therapist will make suggestions, which are believed to have a helpful effect on the way you deal with certain situations. You are always in control and are able to stop any session by simply opening your eyes.

There are details of organisations who can help you find a hypnotherapist on pages 79–80.

Art therapy

Art therapy is used to help people to express themselves. The art therapist may have training in psychotherapy and will encourage you to communicate your feelings through painting, drawing or sculpting. The aim is to express your feelings rather than produce a work of art. The therapy can be given one-to-one with the therapist or in groups.

Music therapy



Being creative can sometimes help you become more aware of difficult feelings and let go of them. These feelings can then be discussed in counselling or group sessions, if appropriate.

You don't need to be able to draw or paint to take part. You will be encouraged to be spontaneous and doodle.

Art therapy is not widely available for cancer patients on the NHS. We have details of how to find an art therapist near you on page 78.

Music therapy

This therapy uses music to improve quality of life, by helping people communicate. You don't need to be able to play an instrument or read music. Music therapy can be carried out individually or as a group.

During the session, you work with a range of easy-to-use instruments to help show your feelings. The aim is to help people who may find it difficult to talk about their feelings to express themselves.

Music therapy has also been shown to help relieve symptoms, such as pain. Some studies found that people using music therapy were able to use lower doses of painkillers to control their pain.

Music therapy is not widely available for cancer patients on the NHS. We have details of how to find a music therapist near you on page 78.

Massage therapy

Massage is often offered as part of cancer care in cancer centres, hospices, community health services and some GP surgeries.

Massage is a form of structured or therapeutic touch. It can be used to:

- relax your mind and body
- relieve tension
- improve the flow of fluid (lymph) in the lymphatic system (lymph nodes are part of the immune system and help to filter germs and disease)
- enhance your mood.

Some studies of people with cancer suggest that massage therapy reduced symptoms, such as pain, anxiety, depression and fatigue.

There are different types of massage therapy. Some massages are soft and gentle, while others are more active and may be uncomfortable. Your therapist will be able to adjust the pressure for your comfort. Cancer doctors and complementary therapists will usually advise you to try gentle massage and avoid vigorous, deep tissue massage.

Some people worry that massage could cause cancer cells to spread to other parts of their body. Research has not found any evidence of this, but massage therapists will avoid any areas affected by cancer, such as tumour sites or lymph nodes. Talk to your cancer doctor or nurse if you are worried.

Massage therapy



Massage therapists working with people with cancer must be properly trained and qualified. They should have some knowledge of cancer and its treatments. They can sometimes teach relatives or friends how to do basic massages, so that they can support you at home.

During your therapy, it is important to avoid massage:

- directly over a tumour or lymph nodes (glands) affected by cancer (lymph nodes are part of the immune system and help to filter germs and disease)
- to areas that are bruised or sensitive
- to areas being treated with radiotherapy, during treatment and for a few weeks after it finishes
- around intravenous catheters (such as central lines) and pain relief patches
- to areas affected by blood clots, poor circulation or varicose veins.

It is also important to be particularly gentle if:

- cancer has spread to your bones
- you have a low platelet count (platelets are cells that help the blood to clot).

If you tend to bleed or bruise easily, or have cancer in your bones, speak to your cancer doctor before having massage therapy.

You can contact the General Council for Massage Therapies (GCMT) (see page 80) to find a trained massage therapist.

Energy-based therapies

This section discusses the following energy-based therapies:

- shiatsu and acupressure
- reflexology
- therapeutic touch.

Energy-based therapies are based on the theory that everyone has a special type of energy that can be worked on for health benefits.

There is no medical evidence that this type of energy exists or that energy-based therapies have any effect on the cancer. Some may be used to try to treat symptoms, but there is no medical evidence that they help. Their most common effects are that some people find them relaxing and calming.

Some energy-based therapies rely on little, if any, physical contact for their effects. Others involve touch or body movements.

Energy-based therapies are available in some hospitals. If you are looking for these therapies somewhere other than in hospital, it is important to check that the therapist or practitioner is trained, registered and insured.

Reflexology



Shiatsu and acupressure

Shiatsu is a Japanese form of massage. Therapists believe that health depends on the balanced flow of energy through certain channels in the body. Their theory is that placing pressure on these channels helps restore energy balance. They may also gently stretch or hold areas of the body to reduce stiffness and soreness.

A recent study showed that acupressure was able to reduce fatigue in women who had been treated for breast cancer. However there is very little medical evidence to show that shiatsu or acupressure helps with any other symptoms. But many people still find it a relaxing or uplifting experience.

As with other types of massage, it is important to take the precautions listed on page 28.

Reflexology

Reflexology is a form of foot or hand massage similar to acupressure. Reflexologists believe different areas on the feet or hands represent, and are connected to, different parts of the body.

They apply gentle pressure to specific points on the feet or hands. The aim is to help you feel more relaxed.

Reflexology has been used to try to improve symptoms related to cancer or its treatment, such as feeling sick (nausea) and pain. There is no evidence to prove that it is effective when used in this way. But some evidence shows that reflexology can help people feel more relaxed and many people use it to help ease stress and anxiety.

Therapeutic touch

In therapeutic touch, the therapist uses touch or works just above the surface of the body. They believe this affects an energy field surrounding each person and they can act as a channel for the healing energy.

There is no medical evidence to show it helps with symptoms or side effects. Some people feel that therapeutic touch gives them valuable support. When it is used in a religious or spiritual way, it is called spiritual or faith healing.

Reiki is another type of therapeutic touch developed in Japan. You sit or lie down and the therapist gently places their hands on or just above your body. They use a sequence of positions that cover most of the body. You don't need to remove any clothing. Each position is held for about two to five minutes or until the therapist feels the flow of energy has slowed or stopped.

You can get more information about therapeutic touch or Reiki from the organisation on page 80.

'It was a set time to think, for time out. Just to sit and perhaps chat a little bit, and then just reflect. That was probably the biggest benefit.'

Nadia

Physical therapies

This section explains complementary therapies that work directly on your body, whether by a therapist or by yourself.

Acupuncture

Some acupuncture originates from Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is based on there being a system of energy channels in the body.

Traditional therapists believe that needles inserted into the skin release a flow of energy and restore a healthy balance to the body. Traditional therapists are not usually registered health professionals.

Western medical acupuncture

This is based on current medical knowledge and evidence-based medicine. It is sometimes available on the NHS.

During an acupuncture session, the therapist inserts fine, sterile needles just below the skin. The needles are put in specific places thought to affect the nerves in the skin and muscle. This can send messages to the brain. Stimulating the nerves in this way may release natural chemicals in the body, such as endorphins. Endorphins are substances that give you a feeling of well-being.

An acupuncturist may be a member of a team working in a pain clinic or part of a palliative care (symptom control) team. Some doctors, nurses and physiotherapists are trained in western medical acupuncture.

Acupuncture



Some studies show that acupuncture may:

- reduce menopausal symptoms, such as hot flushes, in women with breast cancer
- reduce sickness in people who have had chemotherapy.

When carried out by a trained professional, acupuncture is generally safe.

It's advisable to check with your doctor about having acupuncture if you are having treatment, such as chemotherapy, that could affect your blood count. The chemotherapy may result in a lower than normal number of white blood cells, which increases your risk of infection. You should also avoid acupuncture if you have a very low number of platelets (blood cells that help blood to clot) or you bruise spontaneously as this can increase your risk of bleeding.

If you have, or are at risk of, lymphoedema, for example if you have had some or all of your lymph nodes removed, you should avoid having acupuncture in the limb that's affected or at risk. Lymphoedema is swelling to part of the body caused by damage to the lymphatic system (see page 26) and is hard to reverse. Check with your doctor if you're thinking about having acupuncture.

Physical activity

Some types of physical activity, such as yoga, tai chi and qi gong, are designed to work both the body and the mind. They mostly use gentle, controlled, low-impact movements, with breathing exercises. They can be done by people of all ages and of varying fitness levels.

Yoga

There are different types of yoga. They all involve different body positions, breathing exercises and some form of meditation or relaxation.

Some types of yoga use very gentle stretching, movement and meditation. Others may involve more vigorous physical movement and dietary changes.

Yoga is generally safe, but people with some types of cancer may need to adapt some of the positions so they are easier to do.

Some people who have cancer find that yoga helps them cope with their illness and feel better generally. Some studies have found that people who followed a four-week yoga course after they completed their cancer treatment had fewer problems sleeping and felt less tired.

Some small studies have shown that yoga may also help to relieve menopausal symptoms, such as hot flushes and joint pains, but more research is needed. Some hospitals offer yoga classes.

There is more information on how to find a yoga class near you on page 81.

Tai chi and qi gong

Tai chi and qi gong (sometimes spelt chi kung) come from Chinese medical traditions. They include parts of mind-body therapies, energy-based therapies and physical therapies.

Both tai chi and qi gong focus on building strength, balance and flexibility through slow, fluid movements. They also use mental imagery (see page 20) and deep breathing.

Together, the physical and mental exercises can help to improve general health and create a feeling of well-being.

You can get more information about tai chi or qi gong from the complementary therapy organisations on page 77.



Herb and plant extracts

This section covers:

- homeopathy
- aromatherapy
- flower remedies
- herbal remedies.

These therapies use herbs and plants. They are widely available in supermarkets, chemists, health food shops, on the internet, and from nutritionists, herbalists and homeopaths. They are mainly taken by mouth but can also come as oils and creams.

There is no medical evidence to show that flower, plant or herb therapies have any effect on cancer.

A few herb and plant extracts have been shown to be helpful with certain symptoms and side effects (see page 41). But most flower and plant extracts have no effect on cancer symptoms or side effects of treatment.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is used for a number of illnesses. It may be used with conventional treatment to try to improve the quality of life for people with cancer. There is no reliable medical evidence that homeopathy is effective.

Homeopathy is based on the idea that 'like cures like'. Homeopathic medicines are given that are thought to cause similar symptoms to the illness being treated. Therapists believe that this triggers the body's natural reaction against the symptoms.

Homeopathic remedies are mostly made of plant and mineral extracts. They come as tablets, liquids or creams, in a very diluted form. Some of the remedies are diluted so much that they have hardly any of the plant or mineral extract left in them.

Some GPs and hospital doctors are trained in homeopathy, and it is sometimes available through the NHS. If you are interested in this type of therapy, you can discuss it with your GP or cancer doctor.

Homeopathy is safe to use alongside conventional cancer treatments because the remedies are extremely diluted. There is no evidence that it causes direct harm.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the use of natural oils extracted from plants. The oils are thought to be beneficial to your body and mind. They may be used during massage but can also be used in baths and creams, and through diffusers and nasal inhalers.

You don't always have to remove clothing to have massage or aromatherapy. Having your hand, forearm or head and neck massaged can be very relaxing. There is no medical evidence to show that aromatherapy helps with the symptoms of cancer or side effects of treatment. But many people find it a relaxing and enjoyable experience.

It is important to tell the aromatherapist about any medicines you are taking and give them all your medical details. They use very low-strength oils for people with cancer. But some oils can have physical effects on the body and, for example, may affect blood pressure. Also some oils can have oestrogen-like effects. You should avoid these oils if you have an oestrogen-dependent cancer, which includes some types of breast cancer.

If you are having any type of cancer treatment, always check with your cancer doctor before you have aromatherapy. Usually it is fine to have aromatherapy and massage during radiotherapy, as long as it is not used on the area being treated (see page 28).

For more detailed information about aromatherapy and to find a trained therapist, contact the Aromatherapy Council (details are on page 78).

Flower remedies

Flower remedies use the essence of flowers heated in water. You take the remedy as a liquid. They are considered to be safe and some people feel they help reduce anxiety and help them feel better. But no medical evidence has shown this to be true.

Different types of flower remedies are available. You can buy them from health food shops and some chemists.

Flower remedies are sometimes diluted in alcohol, so people who don't drink alcohol may choose not to use them.

Herbal remedies

Herbal remedies use plants or mixtures of plant extracts to treat illness and promote health. Practitioners of Chinese medicine also use herbs as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Herbs may be boiled in water and drunk as a tea, mixed in an alcohol solution, or be made into tablets, creams or ointments.

Some herb and plant extracts have been researched in clinical trials and have been shown to help with certain symptoms or side effects. Others have been shown to have no effect.

Commonly used herbs include:

- ginger – used to relieve feelings of sickness (nausea)
- St John's Wort – used to treat a low mood and mild to moderate depression.

Although plants and herbs are natural, this doesn't mean they are safe. Natural substances can have powerful effects and cause side effects. Some conventional treatments are made from plant extracts. So if you choose to take herbal remedies, it is important to use them safely. You need to be aware of any side effects they may cause.

If you take herbal remedies or are interested in them, talk to your cancer doctor or pharmacist. They need to know all the medicines you are taking and whether they are prescribed. This is so they can give you the best possible care.

Taking herbs during cancer treatment

Although we know about some interactions between herbs and cancer treatments, a herbal supplement may have dozens of compounds. All of its active ingredients may not be known. So it is often not possible to know the effects of herbs and possible interactions with other medicines or treatments.

Many doctors advise that herbal remedies should be avoided during, and for a few weeks before and after, treatment with chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Some herbs can interfere with cancer treatments by making them less effective or by increasing side effects. For example:

- St John's Wort can reduce the effectiveness of the chemotherapy drug irinotecan.
- Drinking green tea or taking extract of green tea may make the cancer medicine bortezomib (Velcade®) less effective.
- Green tea can also increase the side effects caused by the chemotherapy drug irinotecan and by the hormonal therapy tamoxifen.
- Garlic and evening primrose oil may affect blood clotting and should be avoided before surgery.

Some herbs and dietary supplements can interfere with cancer treatments by making them more toxic or less effective. It is important to check with your cancer doctor or pharmacist if you are planning to use herbal remedies or take supplements during, and for a few weeks before and after, cancer treatment.

The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (www.mskcc.org) is a reliable website that can give you safety information about individual herbs. If you are seeing a herbalist, check that they are registered with an accredited body (see page 79).

Diet and food supplements

Many people make changes to their diet after a cancer diagnosis as a way of staying as healthy as possible. They may also do this to help their body cope with the effects of cancer and its treatments. The most important changes people can make for their health are:

- giving up smoking
- increasing physical activity
- eating a balanced diet
- maintaining a healthy weight.

For most people, making these types of changes will make the biggest difference to their health. They can be more helpful than making any one particular change.

People often ask their doctor about 'superfoods' or foods that boost the immune system. But there isn't any medical evidence that suggests these work. Eating a wide range of foods that have the vitamins and minerals your body needs will have the most benefit.

There still isn't enough clear information to make exact recommendations about what someone with cancer should eat. This is because each person's needs are different. In general, cancer experts recommend following a healthy, balanced diet. Your healthcare team (this includes your GP, doctors, nurses and dietitian) are the best people to advise you what lifestyle changes you could make that may help.

We have more information in our booklet **Healthy eating and cancer**. Our website also has a useful video with tips for healthy eating, at [macmillan.org.uk/dietandlifestyle](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/dietandlifestyle)



If you are underweight or find it difficult to eat enough to maintain your weight, then following a healthy eating diet is not recommended. Ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian for specific advice. You may also find it helpful to read our booklets **The building-up diet** and **Recipes for people affected by cancer**. You can order these by calling **0808 808 00 00** or at **be.macmillan.org.uk**

Dietary supplements

For our bodies to work properly, we need nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, protein, fat, carbohydrate and fibre.

The best way to get these is by eating a healthy, balanced diet. However some people with cancer are not able to get all the nutrients they need from their diet. This may be because of problems with eating or because their bodies aren't able to absorb the nutrients.

If you are concerned about your diet or nutrition, ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a dietitian. They can give you advice on what to eat and may prescribe nutritional supplements for you.

If you are not able to eat a healthy balanced diet, your doctor may prescribe a daily multi-vitamin and multi-mineral supplement. This will give you the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of the nutrients you need.

If you are thinking of taking dietary supplements, it is important to talk to your cancer doctor first.

Some people think that if something is good for you in small amounts, taking larger amounts is even better. But this isn't always the case. Nutrients are essential for our health in small amounts. But they can be harmful and cause unpleasant side effects when taken in large amounts. And some may interact with cancer treatments or lessen the effectiveness of them.

Despite a lot of research into cancer and dietary supplements, there isn't enough evidence to suggest that taking them can help treat cancer or stop it from coming back. But research has found that taking certain supplements could increase the risk of some cancers developing. Talk to your cancer doctor or nurse if you are thinking of taking supplements.

Antioxidants

Antioxidants, such as vitamins A, C and E, coenzyme Q10 and selenium are some of the most commonly taken dietary supplements.

Always tell your cancer doctor if you are thinking of taking antioxidants. Antioxidants can help to prevent cell damage. Because of this, some doctors have concerns that taking antioxidant supplements during cancer treatment may make cancer treatment less effective. Your cancer doctor may recommend that you don't take antioxidant supplements during your treatment, unless it is as part of a clinical trial.

If you would like to discuss dietary supplements and get more information, call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Dietitians and nutritional therapists

Dietitians use current medical evidence to give specific advice to people with eating or weight problems. They also give advice on healthy eating in general. Some dietitians have specific training in helping people affected by cancer. Dietitians are regulated by the law and must meet a national standard of practice.

Nutritional therapists are different from dietitians. Some nutritional therapists may be qualified to provide information on healthy eating, but they are not regulated in the same way as dietitians. Some nutritional therapists may try to improve your health using methods such as 'detoxing', suggesting you take high-dose vitamins or avoiding certain food groups, such as sugar. These types of diets are not recommended for people with cancer. We have more information about types of diet on pages 43–45.

There is no medical evidence that nutritional therapy can reduce the chance of cancer coming back. No reliable research has shown that nutritional therapy can improve health.



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SELF-HELP THERAPIES

Types of psychological and self-help therapies 50

Types of psychological and self-help therapies

Psychological and self-help therapies are not complementary therapies. We have included them because many people use them as a further source of support during and after treatment.

There are several ways to get self-help and psychological support. These approaches may be used to help people cope with stress, anxiety and difficult feelings.

You may find that it helps to talk openly and honestly with your family and friends. The healthcare professionals caring for you and who know your situation can also be a good source of support. You can ask your doctor to put you in touch with the psychological support services at your hospital.

Our booklet **Talking about cancer** gives information on the benefits of talking about your illness. Your relatives, friends and carers may find our booklet **Talking with someone who has cancer** useful when they are supporting you. You can order these by calling **0808 808 00 00** or at **be.macmillan.org.uk**

Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is an approach that can help you change the way you think about different experiences. This can help to reduce stress and anxiety. It helps you to pay attention to the present moment using techniques such as meditation and breathing. You are encouraged to become aware of your thoughts and feelings, without making judgements about them.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) are types of mindfulness techniques. They use meditation, yoga and breathing techniques, along with some Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques. The aim is to help you change your thought patterns. Cognitive (thinking) therapy focuses on the 'here and now' difficulties. It looks for ways to change your current state of mind so that your thoughts are more positive.

There are a few centres in the UK that offer mindfulness classes on the NHS. They may also be available through your hospital or a cancer support charity. You can use the organisations on page 77 to help you find one.

Counselling

Many people get support by talking to close family members or friends. But you may find certain feelings very hard to share with them. It can sometimes be useful to talk to someone from outside your support network, who has been trained to listen. Counsellors and psychologists can help you explore your feelings and talk through confusing or upsetting emotions.

Talking one-to-one with a trained counsellor or psychologist can help you find ways of coping with difficult feelings. Some GPs have counsellors within their practice, or they can refer you to a counsellor. Our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00** can give you details of how to find counsellors in your local area.

Support groups

You may be offered the chance to take part in a support group. This is when a trained therapist (counsellor or other professional) encourages a group of people to share their feelings and experiences with each other.

This is different from a self-help group. At a support group, the therapist leading the group will be aware of the individual participants' problems and will be able to guide the discussion so that everyone benefits.

Self-help groups

Organised groups, where people with cancer and their families meet others in a similar situation, can be helpful. This is often the first chance that people have to discuss their experiences with other people living with cancer. These groups can be a source of information and support, and can provide an opportunity for people to talk about their feelings.

Some groups are run by doctors, nurses, counsellors or psychotherapists in a hospital. More commonly, people with cancer run the groups. They often offer different techniques and coping strategies, together with relaxation or visualisation. They can also be a good source of practical information and emotional support.

If you are interested in joining a group but are unsure about whether it would help, make some enquiries about it first. Or you could go to a meeting to see what it's like before joining. You may feel more comfortable if you take a relative or friend along with you. But if you feel it's not for you, you don't have to go again. You may find it more helpful and supportive to find someone you can speak with individually, on a regular basis.

Share your experience

Having cancer is a life-changing experience. When treatment finishes, many people find it helps to talk about it and share their thoughts, feelings and advice with other people. Just hearing about how you've coped, what side effects you had and how you managed them is helpful to someone in a similar situation.

We can help you share your story. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit our website **[macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)** for more information.

'Talking to a trained counsellor every week helped me put into words all the emotions I was going through. It enabled me to deal with my fears and my frustrations, but more importantly, it provided me with a sense of empowerment.'

Aurélie



ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

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What are alternative therapies?

Alternative therapies are different from complementary therapies. They are used instead of conventional medical treatments. They may claim to actively treat or even cure cancer. But there is no scientific proof to back up these claims.

No alternative therapies have ever been proven to cure cancer or slow its growth.

There have been cases where false claims about alternative therapies have led some people to refuse conventional treatments that could have helped them. No reputable alternative therapist will claim to be able to cure cancer.

Alternative therapies are sometimes very cleverly marketed. This means that when you read about them or are told about them, they sound very effective. Therapists may use scientific language to make their claims sound more convincing. But many are based on unproven or disproven theories of how cancer begins or stays in the body.

'I'm a little bit sceptical about a lot of alternative therapies.'

Rupesh

Claims may be based on the therapy's results when it is tested on cancer cells in a laboratory. But this can differ greatly from how the therapy will affect a person with cancer. Claims that an alternative therapy has an anti-cancer action in the laboratory do not mean it will have any effect on someone with cancer.

Very few suppliers of alternative medicines have carried out scientifically-controlled clinical trials for their products. Many alternative therapies rely on individuals' stories or testimonials as evidence that they work. This is called **anecdotal evidence** and is the least reliable type of evidence. This is because it is usually not possible to check whether the effect described is due to the treatment or something else. It is also not possible to check that the person's story is true, or that the person even existed or had cancer.

Why do some people consider alternative therapies?

There are various reasons why some people may choose to try an alternative therapy. Sometimes it is because they feel that conventional medical treatment can't help them or could be harmful.

The idea of having cancer treatments and unpleasant side effects can be frightening for some people. However many people with early cancer can be cured by conventional medical treatments.

If you have been told by your doctors that the cancer can't be cured, you may find it very hard to accept. Some people in this situation may look into alternative therapies. However if a cancer can't be cured by conventional medical treatment, it is equally true that it won't be cured with alternative treatment. In this situation, some alternative therapies may do no harm, but some could be very harmful.

Even when a cancer is advanced, conventional treatments can help to control it and help people live longer, often for many years.

Second opinion

If your doctor tells you that further treatment won't help to control the cancer, you may understandably find it very hard to accept. In this situation, some people find it helps to have a second medical opinion.

The second doctor may be able to offer you another type of conventional treatment. Or they may confirm what you have already been told. This may help you to accept that everything that may help has been tried. If you still want to have treatment, you could ask if there are any cancer research trials that might be appropriate for you.

Our booklets **Coping with advanced cancer** and **Understanding cancer research trials (clinical trials)** have more information. You can order these by calling **0808 808 00 00** or at **be.macmillan.org.uk**

Get advice and support before starting an alternative therapy

If you are considering using alternative therapies, talk to your doctor for advice and support. Doctors are generally supportive of people using any complementary therapies that may help them cope better with their illness. But they usually advise against using alternative therapies.

If you decide to use an alternative therapy, it is important to check it is safe. Always check the credentials of the therapist. Alternative therapies can be expensive and some can cause serious side effects. They can also make you feel unwell and be harmful to your health.



Types of alternative therapy

There are many types of alternative therapy. We have covered the alternative therapies most well-known by people with cancer, but haven't included them all. If you would like to talk to someone about alternative therapies, you can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**.

In this section you can read about:

- Amygdalin (Laetrile[®], Vitamin B17)
- Essiac[®] (Vitaltea[®], Flor-essence[®])
- mistletoe (IsCADOR[®], Eurixor[®])
- metabolic therapy
- diets that claim to treat cancer
- megavitamin therapy.

Amygdalin (Laetrile[®], Vitamin B17)

Amygdalin is a compound found in bitter almonds, peach stones and apricot stones. When amygdalin is processed by the body, it can be changed to cyanide, a type of poison.

A man-made form of it is called Laetrile. It is also sometimes called vitamin B17, although it isn't actually a vitamin.

Many websites that sell Laetrile claim it can slow or stop the growth of cancer. They also claim it can poison cancer cells, without damaging normal cells and tissues. But there is no medical evidence to support this. A review of studies looking at the outcomes for people with cancer taking Laetrile found no evidence that it can control or cure cancer.

Laetrile can have serious side effects. Some people have had cyanide poisoning while taking it and a few people have died as a result. The sale of Laetrile has been banned by the European Commission and by the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) in the USA. Unlike conventional medicines, the manufacture of Laetrile isn't controlled. So if you buy Laetrile, there is no way of knowing what it contains or if it is contaminated with other substances.

If you are thinking of taking Laetrile, it is best to discuss this with your cancer doctor.

Essiac® (Vitaltea®, Flor-essence®)

Essiac is taken as a drink and sold as a nutritional supplement. Some websites claim Essiac can slow down the growth of cancer, or even cure it. But there is no medical evidence that taking Essiac helps treat cancer or improve your quality of life.

Essiac interferes with an enzyme in the body that regulates hormones and vitamin D. It also has an effect on how the body deals with toxins. This may mean taking Essiac with other treatments could make them less effective or increase side effects.

It is important not to take Essiac during cancer treatment or with any other medicines without checking with your cancer doctor first.

Mistletoe (Iscador[®], Eurixor[®])

Mistletoe comes from a group of therapies called anthroposophical medicine. These therapies aim to combine conventional medicine with complementary therapies, including homeopathy (see pages 38–39) and physical therapies (see pages 33–37).

Mistletoe can be taken by mouth or as injections. It may be given by homeopaths and is sometimes described as a herbal or homeopathic remedy.

It is claimed that mistletoe may have various effects, which include:

- improving the quality of life of people with cancer
- reducing the side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

There is no reliable medical evidence that mistletoe is effective in treating cancer or that it can reduce the side effects of treatment.

In general, mistletoe therapy appears to be safe and any side effects are usually mild.

If mistletoe is taken in large doses, it may cause more serious side effects. When given as an injection, mistletoe may cause mild swelling, redness, itching and pain around the injection site. Rarely, it can cause allergic reactions, which may be serious in some people.

Because mistletoe extracts may stimulate the immune system, they could reduce the effectiveness of some medicines. This includes immunosuppressants, which people take after a donor stem cell or bone marrow transplant. It is important to check with your cancer doctor before using mistletoe extracts.

Metabolic therapy

Metabolic therapists think cancer is caused by a build-up of toxic substances in the body. They claim they can treat it by removing toxins and strengthening the immune system. No medical evidence has shown that either of these claims are true.

Metabolic treatments vary from one therapist to another. One of the most well-known is called Gerson therapy. This may include:

- a diet of raw fruit and vegetables
- no processed foods or salt
- vitamins and minerals
- enzymes or chemicals
- coffee enemas.

These are said to flush toxins out of the body. But there is no medical evidence to show that they help treat cancer.

One study compared the results of using a metabolic therapy with chemotherapy. The metabolic therapy included enzymes, nutritional supplements, detoxification and organic foods. The study found that the patients who had the chemotherapy survived three times longer and had better quality of life than those who chose metabolic therapy.

If you have any questions about alternative diets or are thinking of following one, get advice from your doctor, specialist nurse or dietitian.

Possible side effects of metabolic or Gerson therapy include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, a high temperature and headaches. The high levels of hormones and extracts used can sometimes make people feel unwell. Risks of using coffee enemas include infections. They can also cause serious damage to the large bowel.



Diets that claim to treat cancer

There are a number of diets, in addition to the Gerson diet (see page 63), that claim to treat cancer. Some claim to rid the body of toxins. Many of these diets are vegetarian or vegan. They involve eating food that is raw, sugar-free and low in salt. Sometimes vegetable or fruit juices, and high doses of vitamins, minerals or enzymes are used. Other diets are based on claims that some foods 'feed' cancer or affect the pH (acidity) of the body.

It is understandable that some people are attracted to diets that seem to offer hope. But there is no medical evidence that these diets can cure cancer or help people with advanced cancer live longer.

If you choose to follow a diet that cuts out particular types of food, it is important to make sure you aren't missing out on important nutrients. For example, if you follow a dairy-free diet it is important to replace the calcium that you would otherwise get from dairy products, with other calcium-rich foods.

Diets that are high in fibre and low in calories and protein are not appropriate for people who have problems maintaining their weight because of cancer or its treatment. People who are underweight need protein and calories from any source of food. Talk to your specialist doctor, nurse or dietitian before cutting out any food group from your diet.

Megavitamin therapy

This type of alternative therapy involves taking very large doses of vitamins as a way of preventing and treating cancer. However, there is no evidence that taking large doses of vitamins is helpful in treating cancer. Some vitamins can be harmful in high doses.

High-dose vitamin C is one of the most common types of megavitamin therapy. High-dose vitamin C can make many cancer treatment drugs less effective. This includes cisplatin, doxorubicin, imatinib and vincristine. It may also interfere with how radiotherapy works. So it is important to tell your cancer doctor before having high doses of vitamin C, particularly if you are planning on using it during, or within a few weeks of, cancer treatment. High-dose vitamin C may also interact with some complementary and alternative therapies.

High-dose vitamin C is not suitable for people who have kidney problems, a condition that causes iron overload (haemochromatosis) or a G6PDH deficiency. Talk to your doctor if you have any of these problems and are thinking of taking high-dose vitamin C.

Do feelings affect cancer?

Many people who are considering using complementary therapies wonder if there is a link between cancer and psychological factors, such as emotions and stress.

Over the next few pages we go through some common questions and the research that has been done around feelings and cancer.

Are people with particular personality types more likely to get cancer?

Some people believe that people with certain personality types are more likely to get cancer. Others think that personality may affect how long someone with cancer will live for, or whether they may die from cancer.

One large study has shown no medical evidence that people with certain personality types are more likely to get cancer. The same study showed that personality had no effect on the outcome of those who already had cancer.

Can stress cause cancer?

Some people believe that their cancer was caused by stress. The stress may have been caused by a traumatic event, or being exposed to stressful situations over a long period of time. It is very difficult to research whether stress can cause cancer. This is because everyone reacts differently to stress.

Stress may increase our risk of cancer because at difficult times in life, some people may start unhealthy behaviours. This can include smoking or drinking too much alcohol. Studies currently show that stress can result in slight changes to the body's immune system. But there is no evidence this causes cancer or affects its growth.

Can attitude affect cancer?

Some people feel that a positive attitude helps when coping with cancer and its treatments. But a positive attitude means different things to different people – it doesn't mean you have to be cheerful all the time.

Cancer can make people feel helpless and too tired to be positive and fight the cancer. This doesn't mean that their attitude will make treatment any less effective.

It is important to talk to your doctor or nurse if you feel anxious or depressed. There is help available for your emotional and physical well-being. Trying to be positive shouldn't become a burden. Very few people are optimistic all the time, and it is natural and understandable to feel down sometimes.

Can changing my attitude and level of stress help?

Anything that helps you cope in your own way is valuable. Many of the ideas behind complementary therapies suggest that a change of attitude can affect the outlook. But it would be difficult for medical evidence to show whether a change of attitude alone can help with cancer, symptoms or side effects. But many people find complementary therapies helpful, and they can contribute to a sense of well-being and better quality of life. If you would like to talk to someone about managing stress, you can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**.





HOUSING COSTS

LIVING WITH CANCER

TRAVEL ADVICE

LIVING WITH CANCER WHO HAS CANCER

HOUSING COSTS

HOUSING COSTS

HOUSING COSTS

THE CANCER GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

CANCER AND OLDER PEOPLE

GUIDE TO TRAINING SECONDARY

SECONDARY

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About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family and friends.

All of our information is also available online at **macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation**. There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- Easy Read booklets
- ebooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you. No one should face cancer alone.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about your cancer or treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial guidance
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **[macmillan.org.uk/talktous](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talktous)**

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face. Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence. Find your nearest centre at **[macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres)** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

Online community

Thousands of people use our online community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the online community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial guidance

Our financial team can give you guidance on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport) to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)



Macmillan's My Organiser app

This free mobile app can help you manage your treatment, from appointment times and contact details, to reminders for when to take your medication. Search 'My Organiser' on the Apple App Store or Google Play on your phone.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

General complementary therapy organisations

British Holistic Medical Association (BHMA) **www.bhma.org**

An organisation of mainstream healthcare professionals, and complementary and alternative therapists who promote a holistic approach to healthcare.

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)

Tel 020 3668 0406

Email info@cnhc.org.uk
www.cnhc.org.uk

The UK voluntary regulator for complementary health practitioners. You can search for practitioners in your area who meet UK standards of competence and practice.

Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT)

Tel 023 8062 4350

Email info@fht.org.uk
www.fht.org.uk

A professional association for complementary, holistic, beauty and sports therapists in the UK and Ireland.

Search for details of therapists in your area.

The Research Council for Complementary Medicine (RCCM)

Email info@rccm.org.uk

www.rccm.org.uk

RCCM is part of University College London Hospitals NHS foundation trust and accepts all NHS referrals. It runs a complementary cancer care clinic, which offers a programme of treatments to complement conventional cancer therapies, such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery.

Acupuncture

British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS)

Tel 020 7713 9437

Email admin@thebmas.com

www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk

A society of registered doctors and healthcare professionals who practise acupuncture alongside conventional treatments. The website has a search facility to help you find a practitioner of medical acupuncture near you.

Art and music therapy

British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)

Tel 020 7686 4216

Email info@baat.org

www.baat.org

Provides a directory of private art therapists and details of art therapy training courses.

British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT)

Tel 020 7837 6100

Email info@bamt.org

www.bamt.org

The professional body for music therapists and a source of information and support for the general public.

Audiobooks

Pain Relief Foundation

Tel 0151 529 5820

www.painrelieffoundation.org.uk

Produces a variety of books, CDs, audiotapes and relaxation kits designed to help you cope with pain in your own home.

Talking Life

Tel 0151 632 0662

Email info@talkinglife.co.uk

www.talkinglife.co.uk

Specialist producers of self-help and health audio resources. Produces different versions of a stress and relaxation kit, which includes books, CDs or audiotapes.

Herbal medicine

The Bach Centre

Tel 01491 834 678

www.bachcentre.com

Provides information on Bach flower remedies and therapists. Asks people to check the website for answers before contacting them.

National Institute of Medical Herbalists

Tel 01392 426 022

Email info@nimh.org.uk

www.nimh.org.uk

Provides information about herbal medicine and holds a database of registered herbalists in the UK.

Homeopathy

The Society of Homeopaths

Tel 01604 817890

Email info@

homeopathy-soh.org

www.homeopathy-soh.org

A professional body whose members are trained to high standards and agree to practise according to a strict code of ethics and practice.

Hypnotherapy

British Hypnotherapy Association

Tel 020 8942 3988

Email thebha@virginmedia.com

www.hypnotherapy-association.org

You can request a copy of the Hypnotherapy Handbook, which has details of registered practitioners.

British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis

Tel 07702 492867

Email natoffice@bscah.co.uk

www.bscah.com

An organisation of healthcare professionals trained in hypnosis. Aims to promote the safe and responsible use of hypnosis in medicine, dentistry and psychology. Information about finding a hypnotherapist is available on the website.

Reflexology

Association of Reflexologists

Tel 01823 351 010

www.aor.org.uk

You can search for reflexologists in your area, order resources and find out more about the therapy on the website.

Reiki

UK Reiki Federation

Tel 01264 791 441

www.reikifed.co.uk

An independent federation of individuals who have been attuned to Reiki, with the objective of providing support and guidance to Reiki professionals and to the public.

Shiatsu

The Shiatsu Society

Tel 01788 547 900

Fax 01788 547 111

Email admin@shiatusociety.org

www.shiatusociety.org

Gives details about training in Shiatsu and a list of registered practitioners.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

The Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture UK

Tel 0208 457 2560

Email info@atcm.co.uk

www.atcm.co.uk

A regulatory body for the practice of acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, and Chinese therapeutic massage, in the UK. All full members hold a recognised professional qualification and adhere to specific codes conduct.

Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine

Tel 01603 9274 20

Email herbmed@rchm.co.uk

www.rchm.co.uk

The UK professional body for practitioners of Chinese herbs (often combined with acupuncture). All members are bound by a code of ethics and practice.

Yoga

British Wheel of Yoga

Tel 01529 306 851

Email office@bwy.org.uk

www.bwy.org.uk

The governing body for yoga practitioners in the UK. Provides a register of BWY teachers.

General cancer support organisations

Cancer Black Care

Tel 020 8961 4151

Email

info@cancerblackcare.org.uk

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers information and support for people with cancer from ethnic communities, their friends, carers and families.

Cancer Focus

Northern Ireland

Tel 0800 783 3339

Email hello@cancerfocusni.org

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer, including a free helpline, counselling and links to local support groups.

Cancer Research UK

www.cancerhelp.org.uk

Contains patient information on all types of cancer and has a clinical trials database.

Cancer Support Scotland

Tel 0800 652 4531

Email info@

cancersupportscotland.org

www.cancersupportscotland.org

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland.

Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

Healthtalk

www.healthtalk.org

Provides information about some cancers and have video and audio clips of people talking about their experiences of cancer and its treatments.

There is also a section for teens and young adults:

www.healthtalk.org/young-peoples-experiences

Maggie's Centres

Tel 0300 123 1801

Email enquiries@

maggiescentres.org

www.maggiescentres.org

Provides information about cancer, benefits advice, and emotional or psychological support.

The Memorial Sloan

Kettering Cancer Center

www.mskcc.org

Gives research-based information on complementary and alternative therapies.

You can search for information on a number of complementary and alternative therapies.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care

Tel 0845 123 2310

(Mon to Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)

Email

helpline@pennybrohn.org

www.pennybrohncancercare.org

Offers a combination of physical, emotional and spiritual support, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

All services are free. Also offers a variety of books, DVDs, CDs and audiotapes that explore methods of relaxation, meditation and imagery.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

The UK's biggest health information website.

Also has service information for England.

NHS Direct Wales**www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk**

NHS health information site for Wales.

NHS Inform**www.nhsinform.co.uk**

NHS health information site for Scotland.

Patient UK**www.patient.info**

Provides information about health and disease. Includes evidence-based information leaflets on a wide variety of health topics. Also reviews and links to many health-related and illness-related websites.

Riprap**www.riprap.org.uk**

Developed especially for teenagers who have a parent with cancer.

Tenovus Cancer Care**Tel 0808 808 1010**

(Mon to Sun, 8am to 8pm)

www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk

Aims to help everyone get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research

and provides support such as mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, an 'Ask the nurse' service on the website and benefits advice.

Counselling and emotional support**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)****Tel 01455 883 300****Email bacp@bacp.co.uk****www.bacp.co.uk**

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services. You can search for a qualified counsellor at **itsgoodtotalk.org.uk**

The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)**Tel 020 7014 9955****Email info@ukcp.org.uk****www.psychotherapy.org.uk**

Holds the national register of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, listing practitioners who meet exacting standards and training requirements.

Advanced cancer and end-of-life care

Marie Curie Cancer Care

Tel 0800 716 146

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email supporter.relations@mariecurie.org.uk

www.mariecurie.org.uk

Marie Curie nurses provide free end-of-life care to people in their own homes, or in Marie Curie hospices, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Disclaimer

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Thanks

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Sources

We've listed a sample of the sources used in the publication below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at [**bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk**](mailto:bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk)

Garcia MK et al. Systematic Review of Acupuncture in Cancer Care: A Synthesis of the Evidence. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2013; 31 (7): 952–960.

Kassab S et al. Homeopathic medicines for the adverse effects of cancer treatments (Review). *The Cochrane Library*. 2010: Issue (11).

Lesi G et al. Acupuncture As an Integrative Approach for the Treatment of Hot Flashes in Women With Breast Cancer: A Prospective Multicenter Randomized Controlled Trial (AcCliMaT). *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2016; 34 (15):1795-1802.

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



Share your cancer experience

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

Campaign for change

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

Help someone in your community

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

Raise money

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

Give money

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

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Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

This booklet is about the most common types of complementary therapy used by some people with cancer. We hope it gives you a balanced view of what's available and what's involved if you decide to try one.

You might be advised not to have complementary therapies. This is because it isn't safe to have them if you have a certain type of cancer or if you are having certain treatments.

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call our support line.

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