

# Understanding Complementary Therapies

*A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends*



For information & support, call **13 11 20**

## Understanding Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends

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*Understanding Complementary Therapies* is reviewed approximately every 3 years.

Check the publication date above to ensure this copy is up to date.

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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 8 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.



*Cancer Council acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.*



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# About this booklet

This booklet has been prepared to help you understand more about the role of complementary therapies in cancer care. Complementary therapies are designed to be used alongside conventional treatments.

We can't tell you whether complementary therapies will be helpful for you or which ones to use. If you want to use complementary therapies, discuss this with your doctors, pharmacists, and professionals qualified in the therapies that interest you.

This booklet does not include information about alternative therapies, which are used instead of conventional treatment. Cancer Council does not recommend that people use alternative therapies to treat cancer.

We hope this information answers some of your questions and helps you think about what to ask your treatment team (see page 70 for a question checklist). Some terms that may be unfamiliar are explained in the glossary (see page 73). 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.<sup>1-9</sup>



If you or your family have any questions or concerns, call **Cancer Council 13 11 20**. We can send you more information and connect you with support services in your area. You can also visit your local Cancer Council website (see back cover).

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## Key to icons

Icons are used throughout this booklet to indicate:



More information



Alert



Personal story



Tips

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# How is cancer treated?

## Conventional medical treatments

These can be used to remove the cancer, slow or stop the growth and spread of the disease, or provide relief from symptoms. Conventional medical treatments for cancer include surgery, radiation therapy (also known as radiotherapy) and drug therapies (such as chemotherapy, hormone therapy, targeted therapy and immunotherapy).

Conventional medical treatments are based on scientific evidence and 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 (see page 10).

## Complementary therapies

These are said to focus on the whole person, not just the cancer. They include practices like massage and yoga, as well as medicines that you swallow or apply to the skin. Complementary therapies are used with conventional medicines, and may help people cope better with the physical and emotional impact of cancer, as well as side effects caused by conventional cancer treatments. There is no evidence complementary therapies can treat or cure cancer itself.

While some complementary therapies are supported by strong evidence, many others are not. Some are being scientifically tested to see:

- whether they are safe for people with cancer
- whether they improve specific symptoms and treatment side effects
- how they interact with conventional cancer treatments.

## “Complementary” versus “alternative” therapies

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People often use the terms “complementary” and “alternative” as though they mean the same thing. Although they are sometimes combined into one phrase – complementary and alternative therapies – they are different.

### **Complementary therapies –**

These are widely used alongside conventional medical treatments, usually to manage side effects of cancer or its treatment. Some complementary therapies have been scientifically researched to show that they are generally safe and effective to use in people with cancer.

Complementary therapies that are commonly used alongside conventional cancer treatments are discussed in this booklet.

**Alternative therapies –** These are used instead of conventional medical treatments. Cancer Council does not recommend the use of alternative therapies as a treatment for cancer.<sup>1</sup>

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 to be harmful to people with cancer or not to work. While side effects of alternative therapies are not always known, some are serious and may prevent successful treatment of the cancer.

Some alternative therapists 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, please discuss this with your doctor and cancer care team first. Delaying conventional treatment to use an alternative therapy can allow the cancer to grow or make it harder to treat when you start conventional treatment. It may also mean that you are not well enough for conventional treatment.

Alternative therapies can be very expensive, and they are not covered by government-funded schemes such as Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). It is important to consider the cost of these therapies.

**More information –** If you have questions about complementary or alternative therapies, talk to your doctor or call Cancer Council 13 11 20.

# Key questions

## Q: What complementary therapies are available?

**A:** The term complementary therapies covers a broad range of practices and medicines. They can be grouped into different categories (see pages 8–9) and most are part of whole medical systems.

## Q: What are whole medical systems?

**A:** 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 Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese medicine, homeopathy and naturopathy (see pages 37–39).

## Q: What is integrative oncology or medicine?

**A:** This is the combined use of conventional treatments and evidence-based complementary therapies. This approach has been adopted by some cancer centres.

## Using complementary therapies in palliative care

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Many palliative care services offer complementary therapies to patients to help improve their quality of life.

Therapies such as aromatherapy, massage, meditation and reflexology can increase a person's sense of

control, decrease stress and anxiety, and improve mood.

Health professionals involved in palliative care often support patients using complementary therapies that are safe and evidence-based.

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## Q: Why do people use these therapies?

**A:** Complementary therapies are widely used by people with cancer in Australia.<sup>2</sup> There are many reasons why people with cancer use complementary therapies, including to:<sup>3</sup>

- improve quality of life
- take a more active role in their health and recovery
- manage the symptoms and side effects of conventional cancer treatment, such as fatigue, nausea or pain
- strengthen the mind and body to cope with treatment
- look for more holistic ways of treating the whole person
- incorporate traditional or cultural practices (see page 12).

## Q: Should I tell my doctor?

**A:** Yes. Discuss any therapy you are using or thinking about using with your doctors, as some may not be safe or evidence-based. This includes over-the-counter medicines, herbal supplements and vitamins that you buy from a pharmacy or health food store.

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 any medicines. Depending on the treatment you are having, some complementary therapies may cause reactions, make side effects worse or interfere with the success of your conventional cancer treatment (see pages 16–18).

Your doctors may advise you to avoid some complementary therapies while you are having cancer treatment. Your doctor may also be able to refer you to a qualified therapist who understands the role of complementary therapies in cancer care. See the *Safety concerns* chapter, pages 13–22, for more information.

## Complementary therapy categories

Complementary therapies can be grouped into the following 4 categories. Some therapies fit into more than one category.

### Mind–body practices



Mind–body practices are based on the belief that what we think and feel can affect our physical and mental wellbeing.

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

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.

**Examples** – art therapy, counselling, hypnotherapy, laughter yoga, meditation, mindfulness, music therapy, relaxation, spiritual practices.

### Body-based practices



Body-based practices 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. Other practices require you to do a series of movements to stimulate and stretch different parts of the body.

Therapies such as acupuncture, tai chi, qi gong and yoga have a strong mind–body connection, so they may benefit both physical and emotional health.

**Examples** – acupuncture, aromatherapy, massage, qi gong, reflexology, tai chi, yoga.

► For information on individual therapies, see pages 41–62.

## Energy therapies



Energy therapy is based on the belief that the body has an invisible energy field, and when this energy flow is blocked or unbalanced, you can become sick. Unblocking this energy is said to 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 Chinese medicine and prana in Ayurvedic medicine.

There is no scientific evidence of an energy field or that energy therapies have any benefits.

**Examples** – healing touch, reiki.

## 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 may cause chemical changes in the body.

Herbal remedies are often taken by mouth or applied to the skin to treat disease and promote health.

There is no reliable scientific evidence that herbal remedies alone can cure or treat cancer.

**Examples** – bush remedies, Chinese herbal medicine, flower remedies, medicinal cannabis, Western herbal medicine.

## Q: How do we know treatments work?

**A:** A clinical trial can help show whether a treatment works and is safe. In a randomised control trial, one group of people 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, safer and/or more cost-effective.

If a trial proves that a treatment is better than existing options, it may become the new standard of care for patients in the future. Some clinical trials compare existing approaches to see which one is more effective.

Clinical trials for complementary therapies often test treatments on small groups of people with specific cancer types, such as breast and prostate. It can be challenging to establish whether the trial results apply to people with other types of cancer.

Personal (anecdotal) evidence is based on individual people's experiences and observations, rather than on facts. It is not proven and is less reliable than scientific evidence from clinical trials.

▶ See our *Understanding Clinical Trials and Research* booklet and see page 29 for information about joining a clinical trial.

## Q: Which complementary therapies work?

**A:** Cancer Council supports the use of complementary therapies that have been proven to be generally safe and effective in clinical trials (see above) or other scientific studies. Therapies such as meditation, massage and acupuncture can increase your sense of control, decrease stress and anxiety, and improve your mood.

Some evidence supporting the use of individual therapies is summarised for the therapies described on pages 41–62. Only some of the therapies in this book have been scientifically proven to be safe or effective to use for people with cancer. 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.

Many health claims for complementary therapies have not been proven. However, 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.

## **Q: How is allied health different?**

**A:** Allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, dietitians and psychologists, offer a range of evidence-based therapies to diagnose and treat health conditions.

These therapies can offer people with cancer physical, emotional, spiritual and practical support, help reduce side effects from medical treatment, and improve quality of life.

Many allied health practices are part of standard supportive care for cancer and allied health professionals are often members of multidisciplinary cancer teams. They have a university qualification in a recognised allied health field. They are also a member of a national professional organisation that:

- certifies qualifications
- sets and maintains competency standards
- oversees continuing professional development
- has a procedure for dealing with complaints about its members.

Your general practitioner (GP) or specialist can refer you to a range of allied health professionals who have experience working with people affected by cancer. Some allied health therapies can be claimed under Medicare if you have a referral from your GP as part of a Chronic Disease Management Plan.

For more information on the role of exercise and nutrition in cancer care, see pages 31–36.

## Traditional healing practices

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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 use traditional bush medicines to help them get through cancer.

If you want to use bush medicine, discuss this with an Aboriginal health worker or elder.

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

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# Safety concerns

## Are complementary therapies safe?

Some studies have found some complementary therapies to be generally safe to use together with conventional cancer treatments and medicines. However, some complementary therapies can affect the way conventional cancer treatments and medicines work, and even stop them working altogether.

All therapies have the potential to cause injury or harm. When trying anything new, discuss with your doctor and therapist whether it is suitable for you and whether you need to take any safety precautions. Some common safety issues include:

**Mind–body practices** – 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.

**Body-based practices** – If you have cancer in the bones, or bruise or bleed easily, you may need to take care when using body-based practices such as acupuncture and massage (see also page 51).

**Herb and plant-based therapies** – People often think natural products are safe, but this isn't always true. Some herbs can interact with conventional cancer treatment or medicines, and change how they work or how the dose is absorbed (see also pages 16–18).

Some complementary therapists do not need to have any specific qualifications to practise. To reduce the potential for harm, always check the practitioner is qualified. For more information, see page 25.

## Warning signs to look out for

Keep the following warning signs in mind about any therapy or medicine you are thinking about using alongside or instead of a conventional treatment or medicine.

- Any claims that the treatment cures cancer and other illnesses.
- The treatment costs a lot of money, you need to pay in advance for several months' supply or you can only buy it from the therapist.
- The medicine is not listed with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA, see pages 18–19).
- The therapist is not qualified in the therapy they provide or not registered with a governing body or professional association.
- The therapist tells you not to use conventional treatment or medicine as it will stop their therapy or remedy from working.
- The therapist suggests changes to your conventional treatment, asks you not to talk to your doctors about the treatment, or won't tell you what the ingredients are in a herbal preparation they give you.
- The therapist says there are clinical studies showing the effectiveness of their remedy or therapy, but does not show you any articles that have appeared in trustworthy journals reviewed by other scientists.
- The therapist says that the medicine has worked miraculously in other people.
- 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 [accg.gov.au](http://accg.gov.au).



The right therapy for you will depend on your treatment goals. See pages 70–72 for things to consider when choosing a complementary therapy and finding a complementary therapist.

## Telling your doctors about using a therapy

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

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

To keep yourself safe, have the following conversations:

**Talk to your doctors** – It is important to discuss your interest in complementary therapies with your GP, cancer doctors and nurses. Let them know about any specific therapies you are using or thinking about trying.

Talking with your cancer care team allows them to:

- consider your safety and wellbeing
- discuss possible side effects or interactions with conventional treatments and medicines

- suggest other complementary therapies that may help with the issues you have
- refer you to a qualified therapist experienced in working with people with cancer.

Your surgeon, medical oncologist or radiation oncologist may raise 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 (see also page 17).

**Talk to your complementary therapist** – It is also important to tell your complementary therapist that you have cancer, and inform them of the conventional treatments and medicines you're having.

Some therapies may need to be adjusted or avoided to prevent interactions with your conventional cancer treatment.

Ask your therapist what information they need from your cancer specialists to help you avoid risky treatment and drug interactions.

## Safety of herbs

All herbs should be prescribed by a qualified therapist. Although herbs are natural, they are not always safe. Taking the wrong dose or combination, or using the wrong part of the plant, may cause side effects or be poisonous (toxic). Serious side effects include damage to the liver or kidneys.

Some Ayurvedic and Chinese products have been shown to contain lead, mercury and arsenic in high enough quantities to be considered toxic. Other herbal preparations have been found to contain pesticides and prescription medicines.

There are things you can do to use herbal products safely:

- Buy herbal products from a qualified therapist or reputable supplier.
- If your therapist is making up a preparation for you, ask for it to be clearly labelled in English with your name, date, quantity, ingredients, dosage, directions, safety information (if applicable) and your therapist's contact details.
- Avoid buying over-the-counter products online. Products from other countries that are available over the internet are not covered by the same quality and safety regulations as those sold in Australia (see pages 18–19), and may not include the ingredients listed on the label.
- 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 safe use of herbal remedies.
- Check the label for any warnings about side effects and drug interactions. Talk to your doctor and complementary therapist about possible side effects and what you should do if you experience them.
- Report any suspected adverse reactions to any kind of medicine to your therapist or doctor. If the reaction is serious, call Triple Zero (000) or go to your nearest emergency department.



## Using herbs and supplements during treatment

Some common herbs and supplements have been shown to cause harmful interactions with cancer treatments, including surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Talk to your surgeon or oncologist about whether you need to stop taking any herbs or supplements before treatment.

<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 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 having hot flashes, however, it has not been shown to help. While clinical trials show that black cohosh is relatively safe, it should not be used by people with liver damage. There is no evidence to support the use of black cohosh in people with cancer.
<b>fish oil, ginkgo biloba and garlic</b>	Studies have shown that these products 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 from working properly.

- Keep your complementary therapists and other health professionals informed about any herbs and supplements you use before, during or after cancer treatment. This will help them give you the best possible care.
- 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 to your smartphone or tablet.

## Safety of oils used in bodywork

Concentrated oils extracted from plants, such as lavender or tea tree, are called essential oils. Before being applied to the skin, essential oils need to be diluted by being mixed with a base oil. Base (or carrier) oils are usually made from kernels or nuts, such as almonds. Sometimes mineral oil is used instead as it is odourless.

Allergic 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.

## Regulation of medicines

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is an Australian Government department that assesses and monitors (regulates) all therapeutic goods and medicines sold in Australia. This includes complementary medicines such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, nutritional supplements, homeopathic remedies and some aromatherapy products.

The regulation of complementary medicines helps to protect the public. It helps ensure that therapeutic goods are produced to an acceptable standard of safety and quality (good manufacturing practice) and that any adverse reactions can be investigated.

Most therapeutic goods supplied in Australia – whether made in Australia or overseas – must be included on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG). Some homeopathic preparations are exempt from this requirement. Visit [tga.gov.au/resources/artg](http://tga.gov.au/resources/artg) to search the ARTG for a specific medicine.

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

**AUST L (listed)** – These products make low-level health claims and contain pre-approved low-risk ingredients. They are reviewed for safety and quality only, not for how well they work. Products in this category include sunscreen, vitamin and mineral supplements, and herbal medicines. These products are available at supermarkets, health food stores and pharmacies, and you don't need a prescription.

**AUST L(A) (assessed listed)** – These products make higher-level health claims than other listed medicines and contain pre-approved ingredients. The TGA assesses them for safety, quality and whether the scientific evidence shows that the product does what it says it does. These products may include the “TGA assessed” symbol on the label and are sold at pharmacies, supermarkets and health food stores.

**AUST R (registered)** – Because these products are considered higher risk, they are evaluated by the TGA for safety, quality and whether the scientific evidence shows that the medicine does what it claims. They include all prescription medicines, most over-the-counter medicines and some higher-risk complementary medicines. Registered complementary medicines may include the “TGA assessed” symbol on the label.



Many pharmacies and health food stores sell herbal preparations. For more information on the safety, labelling and regulation of these medicines, visit [tga.gov.au](http://tga.gov.au).

## Regulation of complementary therapists

Some complementary therapists are required to be registered and accredited, but most are unregistered.

**Registered health practitioners** – The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and 15 National Boards regulate certain types of health practitioners, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, psychologists, physiotherapists and Chinese medicine practitioners (including acupuncturists).

Health practitioners must meet certain standards before they can be registered and accredited with a National Board. This helps ensure that only trained and competent health professionals practise within these professions. It is unlawful for a person to pretend to be a registered health practitioner. If you have concerns about the performance or conduct of a registered health practitioner, you can contact AHPRA (visit [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au)).

**Unregistered health practitioners** – Some health practitioners are not legally required to be registered with a National Board. They are known as unregistered health practitioners or general health service providers. They may join a professional association that sets minimum standards, but membership is voluntary. In some states, unregistered health practitioners are required to follow a Code of Conduct, which must be displayed in the premises. If you have an issue with an unregistered practitioner, talk to them first. If you're not satisfied, you can lodge a complaint (see opposite page).



Because they are not regulated in the same way as doctors, nurses and other registered health practitioners, standards of care may differ from one complementary therapist to another.

The following complementary therapy providers that are not registered with AHPRA have set up their own regulatory bodies:

**Naturopaths and Western herbalists** – Most naturopaths and herbalists are members of the Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists (ARONAH). This is a self-governing body that sets minimum standards of practice for both professions. Visit [aronah.org](http://aronah.org).

**Homeopaths** – 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. Visit [aroh.com.au](http://aroh.com.au).

## What can I do if something goes wrong?

If you experience any side effects that you think are from a complementary therapy, stop the treatment and talk to your therapist about your options. These may include adjusting your treatment, stopping the treatment permanently, seeking a second opinion, or seeing another qualified therapist. You can also talk with your doctor or pharmacist about your concerns. If you have a serious reaction, call Triple Zero (000) or go straight to your nearest hospital emergency department.

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

- If they belong to a professional association, contact the association with a formal complaint (see pages 65–67 for contact details).
- Contact the health care complaints commission in your state or territory (see next page for details).

## Health care complaints commissions

These organisations protect public health and safety by investigating and resolving complaints about health care providers. They can also prosecute serious complaints.

State/ territory	Contact details
ACT	ACT Human Rights Commission 02 6205 2222 <a href="http://hrc.act.gov.au">hrc.act.gov.au</a>
NSW	Health Care Complaints Commission 1800 043 159 <a href="http://hccc.nsw.gov.au">hccc.nsw.gov.au</a>
NT	Health and Community Services Complaints Commission 1800 004 474 <a href="http://hcsc.nt.gov.au">hcsc.nt.gov.au</a>
QLD	Office of the Health Ombudsman 133 646 <a href="http://oho.qld.gov.au">oho.qld.gov.au</a>
SA	Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner 1800 232 007 <a href="http://hcsc.sa.gov.au">hcsc.sa.gov.au</a>
TAS	Health Complaints Commissioner Tasmania 1800 001 170 <a href="http://www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au">www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au</a>
VIC	Health Complaints Commissioner 1300 582 113 <a href="http://hcc.vic.gov.au">hcc.vic.gov.au</a>
WA	Health and Disability Services Complaints Office 08 6551 7600 / 1800 813 583 <a href="http://hadsco.wa.gov.au">hadsco.wa.gov.au</a>

# Making informed decisions

Some people consider using 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.

Complementary therapies can be expensive and time-consuming, and they may not offer any benefits. Deciding whether to use complementary therapies and which ones to choose is a similar process to deciding on a course of conventional treatment.

It is important to ask your cancer specialist, GP and complementary therapist questions (see suggestions on pages 70–72). This helps ensure you receive therapies that are suitable for your situation.

It is your decision whether you choose to use complementary therapies. Try to understand as much as possible about each complementary therapy you are considering using, including how it works, possible side effects and costs. This will help you to weigh up the options and make a well-informed decision.

Some people may feel pressure from friends and family to use untested therapies. Knowing that the advice is usually given out of concern, you may feel guilty if you don't want to try the recommended therapy. However, it's your right to decide what treatments to have.



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. Which therapies are suitable for treating the issue you want help with?
- Consider possible side effects and safety issues of the different therapies you are interested in. Are there any reasons why you shouldn't use them?
- Consider whether you prefer to use complementary therapies with strong scientific evidence, or whether anecdotal evidence is enough for you.
- Find out what therapies are offered at your hospital or treatment centre.
- Ask how much the various therapies cost (see page 28).

### Find out more about different therapies

- Gather information about the effectiveness of the therapy. Consider whether the evidence is accurate, up to date, and comes from a reliable source.
- Borrow books from a library or read about therapies on trustworthy websites (see page 26).
- Ask the therapist about the quality of the product and how it is regulated.
- Talk to other people who have tried these treatments, for example, at a cancer support group or through Cancer Council Online Community – visit [cancercouncil.com.au/OC](http://cancercouncil.com.au/OC).
- Write down any questions you have or use the question checklist on pages 70–72.

### Discuss your concerns

- Talk to your therapist or doctor about the therapies you would like to try, and whether there are any potential interactions with your conventional treatments or other side effects you should be aware of.
  - Get a second opinion if you are not happy with the information you receive.
- ▶ Call Cancer Council 13 11 20 to find out more about using complementary therapies as part of your cancer care.

## Finding a complementary therapist

Talking with your GP or cancer care team is a good starting point. Your cancer treatment centre may offer some complementary therapies or be able to recommend suitable therapists in your local area. Natural therapy associations often provide directories of therapists (see pages 65–67). Your family or friends or support group may also be able to recommend a therapist. Some doctors, nurses and pharmacists are also qualified in a complementary therapy, such as nutritional and herbal medicine, hypnotherapy, counselling, acupuncture or massage.



### What to consider when choosing a therapist

- Always check the therapist's qualifications and whether they are a member of a professional association.
- Ask if they have experience treating people with your type of cancer.
- Ask about the cost for each session (see page 28) and how many sessions you are likely to need.
- Ask if they have insurance.
- Confirm that the therapist is willing to communicate with your cancer care team 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 are taking or your conventional treatment plan. This reduces the risk of them dispensing remedies or other treatments that might interact with your conventional treatment.
- Keep a record of the treatments given and medicines or supplements you have been prescribed.
- Take someone with you to appointments to offer support, get involved in the discussion, take notes or simply listen.

## How to assess online information

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There are 4 key ways to ensure the information you are looking at online is trustworthy:

- **The source** – Is it reputable? Have you seen it before? Is it clear who is providing the information? Check the “About us” section.
- **The reviewers** – Has the information been reviewed by experts with qualifications specifically related to cancer?

- **The date** – When was the information last reviewed? Ideally, it should be within the last 2–3 years.
- **The claims** – Is the website promoting a “miracle cure” or selling something? If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Check with your doctor before trying any new therapy.

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## 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 and wellbeing. However, it is important to discuss ways to manage any symptoms and side effects with your doctors, rather than self-diagnosing.

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, or meditating.

Some people may consider self-prescribing herbs or nutritional supplements. Although this may seem like a cheaper alternative, it may not be safe (see pages 16–17). 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

- may be experienced in treating a range of conditions and have treated other people with cancer
- are able to liaise with your cancer specialists, 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 recommend good quality products and how to take them to achieve the desired effect
- 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 18-19 for more information.

## **A second opinion**

Just as you may want to get a second opinion from another cancer 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 therapy.

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 care for your treatment goals. They may be able to suggest other complementary therapies that would be suitable.

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

## Costs

Complementary therapists set their own fees for consultations.

The cost can vary depending on the training and experience of the therapist, the length of the consultation, the treatment provided, and where you live.

Fees for a private complementary health therapist can range from about \$60 to \$200 per hour, which may not include the cost of herbal remedies, essential oils, nutritional supplements or other products. Some cancer centres provide free or subsidised complementary therapies to their patients.

Naturopaths, herbalists and homeopaths may dispense remedies that they mix for you, sell you pre-made nutritional, herbal or homeopathic supplements, or refer you to a naturopathic dispensary to have a script made up. How much you have to pay for these products varies depending on the type of remedy and the ingredients, strength and quantity. Consider speaking to a few therapists to compare costs.

Complementary therapies are not covered by government-funded schemes such as Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). It is important to consider the cost of these therapies if you are thinking about using them.

If you have private health insurance, check whether you are eligible for a rebate on the cost of a consultation with a complementary therapist. Many therapies are not subsidised by private health insurance providers, due to lack of evidence for their effectiveness.

Most health funds also do not provide a rebate on the cost of any remedies or supplements that you buy.

*“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 (MYELOMA)

## **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 popularity of complementary therapies in Australia, the NICM Health Research Institute at Western Sydney University was established to promote research in this area of health care (visit [nicm.edu.au](http://nicm.edu.au)).

Some health professionals, 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 to join a clinical trial, discuss the questions on page 72 with the clinical trials team and your cancer specialists.

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 the trial coordinator for information.

You may find it helpful to talk to your specialist, cancer care team or GP, or to get a second opinion. 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).

► See our *Understanding Clinical Trials and Research* booklet.

## Key points about using complementary therapies

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**What they are** Any of a range of therapies used alongside conventional treatment to improve general health, wellbeing and quality of life.

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**Why people use them** 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, managing side effects of cancer treatment, and improving emotional wellbeing.

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**Safety and effectiveness**

- 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 herbs, minerals, vitamins, nutritional supplements, homeopathic medicines and some aromatherapy products. These products have not been individually assessed to see how well they work.
- Tell your doctors and your complementary therapist about all drugs, herbs, nutritional supplements and other remedies you take. Herbs and conventional treatments can sometimes interact and stop medicines from working properly or cause side effects.
- It is important that you let your doctors know if you are considering using alternative therapies instead of conventional cancer treatments and medicines.

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# The role of exercise and nutrition

It's common for people with cancer to have questions about what to eat and whether to exercise during and after treatment. The right diet and exercise for you depends on the cancer type, the treatments you are having, your general health and your doctor's advice. See the next two pages for information on how exercise and a balanced diet can help you look after your physical and emotional wellbeing.

## Who can help with nutrition and physical activity?

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Your GP and treatment team can provide general advice, but the following experts can also help.

**Exercise physiologist** – An accredited exercise physiologist (AEP) has completed at least a 4-year university degree. They use exercise as medicine to help with chronic disease management and overall wellbeing.

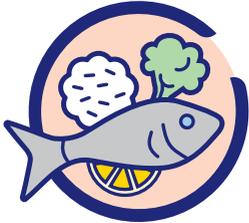
**Physiotherapist** – This allied health professional has completed at least a 4-year university degree. They focus on physical rehabilitation and prevention and treatment of injuries using a variety of techniques, including exercise, massage and joint manipulation.

**Dietitian** – An accredited practising dietitian (APD) has completed a 4-year university degree in science, nutrition and dietetics. They modify diets to help treat disease symptoms and to get the most out of food.

**Nutritionist** – This term refers to both qualified nutrition scientists and naturopathic nutritionists. Some dietitians also call themselves nutritionists. Nutritionists working in the natural health industry should have at least a diploma of nutrition, or equivalent, from a university or naturopathic college.

For nutrition advice specific to cancer, speak to an accredited practising dietitian.

## How exercise and a balanced diet can help

Exercise	Why it is useful	What to expect
	<p>Research shows that exercise benefits most people both during and after cancer treatment.</p> <p>It increases energy levels, improves sleep, reduces treatment-related muscle loss, improves bone and muscle strength, improves mobility and balance, relieves stress, and decreases fatigue, anxiety and depression.<sup>4</sup></p>	<p>The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia recommends that people with cancer do:<sup>4</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) of moderate intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes (1¼ hours) of vigorous intensity aerobic exercise every week</li> <li>• 2–3 strength-training (resistance exercise) sessions a week to build muscle strength.</li> </ul>
Balanced diet	Why it is useful	What to expect
	<p>Cancer and its treatment both place extra demands on the body.</p> <p>Research shows that eating well before, during and after treatment can help you cope better with treatment side effects and speed up recovery, increase energy and maintain wellbeing.</p>	<p>Cancer Council recommends that most people with cancer follow the <i>Australian Dietary Guidelines</i> (<a href="http://eatforhealth.gov.au">eatforhealth.gov.au</a>), and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eat a balanced diet from the 5 food groups – fruit, vegetables and legumes, wholegrains, meat (or alternatives) and dairy (or alternatives)</li> <li>• limit foods containing saturated fat, added salt and added sugars, avoid sugary drinks, and limit alcohol.</li> </ul>

## How to exercise safely

- Before taking part in any exercise program, it is important to talk to your cancer care team or GP about any precautions you should take. Ask about the amount and type of exercise that is right for you.
- Exercise professionals, such as an accredited exercise physiologist or physiotherapist, can develop an exercise program to meet your specific needs and show you how to exercise safely. Some treatment centres have professionals who are specially trained in exercise interventions for people with cancer.

## More information

- To find a physiotherapist, visit [choose.physio/find-a-physio](http://choose.physio/find-a-physio).
- To find an accredited exercise physiologist, visit [essa.org.au/find-aep](http://essa.org.au/find-aep).
- ▶ See our *Exercise for People Living with Cancer* booklet for examples of aerobic, strength-training and flexibility exercises.

## How to eat well

For some people, it is not always possible to eat well during cancer treatment. You may find it hard to eat enough or you may have trouble eating some foods. This may mean that your food choices need to be different from the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*.

An accredited practising dietitian can:

- help ensure you meet your nutritional needs
- give you tailored advice on your food choices, nutrition and how to cope with any eating problems you may experience
- assist in managing side effects.

If you find swallowing food and drink difficult, a speech pathologist can help.

## More information

- To find an accredited practising dietitian, visit [dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://dietitiansaustralia.org.au).
- To find a certified practising speech pathologist, visit [speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://speechpathologyaustralia.org.au).
- ▶ See our *Nutrition for People Living with Cancer* booklet.

## Other muscle and movement therapies

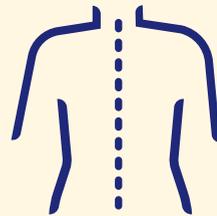
While studies into the use and safety of these therapies in people with cancer are limited, these forms of therapist-led movement exercise can help improve breathing, strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing. For information on yoga, see pages 61–62.

### Bowen technique (Bowtech)



A therapist 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 most people have 3–4 sessions.

### 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, this therapy can enhance mental and physical functioning.

### 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 change postural habits that have contributed to pain, reduced mobility and poor coordination. Pilates started as a form of physical therapy.

### 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 therapists use touch, movement, guided imagery and mindful body awareness to stimulate the brain to improve movement and posture.

## Should I change what I eat?

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.

While it's best to get vitamins and minerals from eating whole foods, they are sometimes taken as supplements. For example, doctors may advise some people to take calcium or vitamin D supplements during and after treatment. If you were taking supplements before treatment, ask your cancer specialist if it is safe to continue.

## Unproven diets

Some people claim that a particular diet or way of life can cure or control cancer on its own. Often these diets are promoted on social media or in the traditional media (see the next page).

There are no special foods, diets or vitamin and mineral supplements that have been scientifically proven to cure cancer. There's also no research that shows any particular foods can lower the chance of the cancer coming back.

Following an unproven diet may mean you don't get enough energy (kilojoules/calories), protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. This may affect your energy levels, cause unwanted weight loss and fatigue, and weaken your immune system.

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. You can become malnourished regardless of how much you weigh.



## Taking care with special diets during treatment

During treatment, following the diets listed below may stop you getting enough nutrients for your body to work properly.

<b>Gerson therapy</b>	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.
<b>high doses of vitamins</b>	Some people believe that taking high doses of certain vitamins strengthens the body's immune system during cancer treatment. There is little evidence to support this claim. In fact, many vitamins and minerals can be toxic at high levels (for example vitamin E in high doses may increase the risk of bleeding). They may also affect how radiation therapy, chemotherapy and other drugs work.
<b>alkaline diet</b>	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.
<b>macrobiotic diet</b>	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.
<b>paleo diet</b>	This diet consists of fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, meats and eggs, but excludes grains and dairy products. Eating grains is essential for a healthy digestive system. This diet is not recommended during cancer treatment.

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

# Whole medical systems

Many complementary therapies are part of whole medical systems. See the table on the next 2 pages for a brief overview of the main whole medical systems used in Australia – Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese medicine, homeopathy and naturopathy.

These systems share some 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 wellbeing.
- The body can heal itself.
- Health care is usually tailored to the individual.

## Beliefs behind Chinese medicine

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According to Chinese medicine, everyone has a vital energy or force in the body 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 2 opposite and complementary forces known as

Yin and Yang. In Chinese medicine, the belief is that Yin and Yang are in everything. Yin is represented by water and Yang by fire. The balance between the 2 maintains harmony in your body, mind and the universe.

Chinese medicine also uses the theory of 5 elements – fire, earth, metal, water and wood – to explain how the body works. These elements correspond to particular organs and tissues in the body.

## Using whole medical systems

Type	What it is
<b>Ayurvedic medicine</b>	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 5 elements: air, water, fire, earth and space. These elements form 3 energies or life forces called doshas: vata, kapha and pitta.
<b>Chinese medicine</b>	Chinese medicine is based on the idea of balance between mind, body and environment to prevent and manage diseases (see also page 37). Chinese medicine considers the person's overall condition, not just their symptoms. It includes many different practices such as 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 dietary changes.
<b>homeopathy</b>	Homeopathy is a system of health care based on the theory that "like cures like". Homeopathic remedies are made from plant, mineral and animal substances that are diluted in water. They are said to stimulate energy in the body that relieves the symptoms of ill health, helps restore vitality and reduces emotional imbalances in the body. Homeopathy is commonly used in India alongside conventional treatment.
<b>naturopathy</b>	Naturopathy has two main beliefs – that good health depends on the interaction of the mind, body and spirit, and that the body has its own healing ability. It is based on 6 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	Evidence for people with cancer
<p>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 herbal medicine, dietary changes, massage, meditation and yoga.</p>	<p>There is good evidence for the effectiveness of some parts of Ayurvedic medicine, such as massage (pages 49–51), meditation (pages 57–58) and yoga (pages 61–62). There is limited clinical evidence on the herbal remedies and certain diets used.</p>
<p>A practitioner will take a case history and do a physical examination. This usually includes 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.</p>	<p>There is clinical evidence for the benefits of some aspects of Chinese medicine, while for other aspects the evidence is limited. For benefits and evidence of specific therapies, see acupuncture (pages 41–42), Chinese herbal medicine (page 44), qi gong (page 55) and tai chi (pages 59–60).</p>
<p>A homeopath considers your medical history, as well as the kind of person you are and how you respond physically and emotionally to your symptoms. A remedy is prescribed as liquid drops or tablets, which are taken throughout the day. You may also be given a cream for your skin.</p>	<p>There is no reliable scientific evidence that homeopathy has any benefits for people with cancer.</p>
<p>After taking a case history, a naturopath may suggest a combination of dietary changes, exposure to natural elements (water and sunlight), massage or exercise, lifestyle changes, counselling, and herbal or nutritional remedies.</p>	<p>Some aspects of naturopathy, such as massage and nutrition (excluding extreme dietary practices), have good clinical evidence. Other aspects have mixed levels of evidence. See massage (pages 49–51) and Western herbal medicine (pages 60–61).</p>



## Mary's story

*I was diagnosed with a neuroendocrine tumour in my pancreas 4 years ago. For the last 3 years, I've been having regular injections of a medicine called octreotide to help me manage the symptoms.*

*I've been doing tai chi and mindfulness classes online through Cancer Council Tasmania for the last 12-18 months and plan on continuing with both of them.*

*Because of my current symptoms, I choose not to drive often, and I'm not confident to shop or do things outside our home alone. Being able to do the classes from home has been wonderful – I don't have to rely on other people to get there and I can sit down and be comfortable.*

*Tai chi got me moving. I found exercising and connecting with other people in the class to be good for my mental health. I'm not the sort of person to do tai chi each morning on my own, but committing to a class gives me the discipline to do it.*

*It is lovely to see the same faces each week and have a conversation with them. It helps that the class is for people with cancer – it doesn't matter if I feel a bit unwell or I need to take a break during the class.*

*The mindfulness instructors gave me some useful techniques to help me cope with pain, not being able to sleep, and feeling anxious before appointments. I've been able to practise these techniques on my own time.*

*You can feel very isolated living in a remote area, and these classes have been a great way to reach out and not feel stuck at home. I'm now 70, and being able to use technology to connect with other people has been wonderful.*

***“I've found going to these classes uplifting.”***

# Individual therapies

This chapter provides a brief overview of some complementary therapies commonly used alongside conventional cancer treatments. They are listed in alphabetical order. See the *Safety concerns* chapter on pages 13–22 and talk to your doctors and complementary therapist about which therapies are suitable for you.

## Acupuncture

**What it is:** Acupuncturists put fine, sterile needles just under the skin into energy channels called meridians, which are said to regulate 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 37) 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 the body 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 acupuncture points on your body. The needles are left in place for 30 seconds to 30 minutes, and may be stimulated manually by twirling 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. Some acupuncturists use laser light instead of needles to stimulate acupuncture points (laser acupuncture).

Some people may bruise or bleed around the insertion point. Check with your doctor whether acupuncture is suitable for you, as penetration of the skin barrier by needles may increase the risk of infection or bleeding for some people having cancer treatment.

**Evidence:** Clinical guidelines recommend acupuncture for joint pain related to using aromatase inhibitors, and include it as an option for managing cancer pain, musculoskeletal pain, chemotherapy-induced tingling in the hands and feet (peripheral neuropathy), cancer-related fatigue and hot flushes.

Evidence suggests acupuncture may also help with chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting, sleep disturbance and anxiety. It's not clear whether it helps relieve dry mouth, but several studies are underway.



In Australia, use of the term acupuncturist is regulated by AHPRA and the Chinese Medicine Board. You can check your acupuncturist is registered at [www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au](http://www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au). Some registered acupuncturists in Australia have special training in treating cancer-related conditions. Ask your doctor whether acupuncture 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 are thought to have a positive effect on the body's tissues, the mind and spirit.

**What to expect:** The aromatherapist blends essential oils and adds them to a base (carrier) oil before applying them to your skin during a massage. See also *Safety of oils used in bodywork*, page 18.

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

## Art therapy

**What it is:** A way to express feelings using visual art. Discussing the work you create with a trained art therapist can help you understand your emotions and concerns.

**Why use it:** The process of creating art can be a way to explore feelings and issues that are hard to put into words. Art therapy can also help with solving problems, improving mood and reducing stress.

**What to expect:** With the support of an art therapist, you can create any type of art: drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or digital work. Some cancer centres run art therapy programs.

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.

**Evidence:** There is some evidence that art therapy helps manage symptoms of fatigue and anxiety, and improves quality of life. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it improves coping skills and emotional wellbeing.

## Chinese herbal medicine

**What it is:** Chinese herbs are a key part of Chinese medicine (see pages 37–39 for more information). 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:** Some people believe that herbs can unblock meridians and bring harmony to the forces in the body, such as Yin and Yang.

**What to expect:** The practitioner will take a case history and assess how your body is out of balance. This will include a tongue and pulse analysis. They will choose a combination of herbs and foods with the aim of bringing your body back into balance.

Chinese medicine practitioners make a formula tailored specifically to your condition, or they can dispense herbal medicines pre-packaged as granules, pills or raw herbs.

**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. See pages 16–17 for tips on using herbs safely and visit [www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au](http://www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au) to check your practitioner is registered with the Chinese Medicine Board.



If you are thinking about attending a group counselling session, it is important to check that it is being led by a trained counsellor. They can guide the group and offer strategies to deal with specific issues that arise during the session.

## Counselling

**What it is:** Through discussions with a counsellor or psychologist, you can identify goals you would like to achieve, develop ways to deal with difficult situations or relationships in your life, and look at how to manage your feelings. Counselling allows you to explore ways of resolving negative thoughts and feelings that impact on your health and day-to-day life. It is a non-judgemental and confidential process.

**Why use it:** Counselling sessions allow you to express your emotions in a safe and supportive environment and learn new coping skills. Counselling can strengthen your ability to deal with challenges and help you gain a new way of looking at your life choices and behaviours. It can also provide an opportunity to talk about thoughts and feelings that you might not feel comfortable sharing with family and friends. Counselling may provide strategies to help manage fear of the cancer coming back.

**What to expect:** Counselling appointments may be face-to-face, over the phone or online. There are different forms including cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), grief therapy, life coaching, acceptance and commitment therapy, and person-centred therapy. Talk to the counsellor about the approach they take and whether it is suited to you. Counselling can be for you, or for family or friends affected by cancer.

**Evidence:** There is long-established evidence of the benefits of counselling. It can help reduce distress, anxiety and depression, and improve quality of life. CBT can help manage cancer-related fatigue.

## Getting help with your emotions

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If you're interested in counselling, meditation and relaxation, you can seek help from a variety of health professionals and services. However, it is important that you find a suitably qualified counsellor you feel comfortable talking with.

Let your therapist know if you have a history of anxiety, depression or any other mental health condition, as you may be feeling more vulnerable now.

**Counsellor** – Counsellors can help clients come up with strategies for managing their concerns. They do not need to have any qualifications to practise, though many are qualified with a background in counselling, nursing, social work and psychology. It's a good idea to check the counsellor's qualifications before making an appointment. Counselling may also be available through your local Cancer Council – call 13 11 20 to find out.

**Psychologist** – Psychologists use evidence-based strategies to guide people through issues with how they think, feel and learn. They cannot prescribe medicines. A registered psychologist must complete 4 years of psychology

at undergraduate level, followed by either postgraduate study or supervised clinical practice.

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

### How to find help

Some counsellors specialise in treating people affected by cancer. You may be able to see a psychologist or psychiatrist at your hospital or cancer treatment centre.

You can also ask your GP for a referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist, as you may be eligible for a Medicare rebate to help cover the cost. To find a psychologist in your area, visit [psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist](http://psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist).

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](http://moodgym.com.au) or [mindspot.org.au](http://mindspot.org.au). For 24-hour crisis support, call Lifeline 13 11 14 or visit [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au).

## 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:** Some people believe that flower remedies 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.

Always confirm the actual ingredients in the suggested remedy and discuss with your cancer care team before taking them. Some herbs may interact with some cancer treatments and medicines, and cause side effects. See pages 16–17 for tips on using herbs safely.

**Evidence:** Scientific evidence does not support the use of flower remedies for treating diseases. However, anecdotal evidence suggests they may be helpful for reducing fear, anxiety or depression.

*“After surgery, my naturopath gave me Bach Flower Remedies for fear, shock and exhaustion. These helped me relax.”* LOUISE (BOWEL CANCER)

## 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 is thought to work with your personal energy field to support the body's own natural ability to heal.

**What to expect:** Healing touch can be done while you are sitting, lying down or standing. The therapist may perform a meditation and assess your energy field by observation and moving their hands over your body.

**Evidence:** There is no scientific evidence of an energy field or that energy therapies have any benefits.

## Hypnotherapy

**What it is:** Deep relaxation that is used to help people become more aware of their inner thoughts and to develop ways to help them manage their situation.

**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:** A trained therapist will take a case history and discuss your reasons for having hypnotherapy. They will 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, fatigue, hot flushes, nausea and vomiting related to cancer treatment.

## Laughter yoga

**What it is:** Laughter yoga, also known as 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.

**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.

## 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.

**Why use it:** All styles of massage aim to promote deep relaxation in tissue by applying pressure to 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. It may be helpful at any stage – from those newly diagnosed to people who have finished their cancer treatment.

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.

Some types of massage can help reduce the symptoms of lymphoedema (swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid). This is called manual lymphatic drainage – see opposite page.

**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 may help manage symptoms such as stress, pain, anxiety, depression and fatigue in people who have had chemotherapy or surgery for cancer.

## Massage concerns for people with cancer

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See an accredited oncology massage therapist or lymphoedema practitioner to ensure they know to avoid massaging near known areas of cancer, and understand how to adapt massage to specific safety concerns relating to cancer treatments.

**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), or may find they bruise or bleed easily, so should avoid deep massage.

**Radiation therapy** – The skin may be sensitive to touch after external radiation therapy. It may look red and appear sunburnt. If you are having radiation therapy, you should avoid massage to the treated area once any skin changes appear or your skin becomes sensitive. 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 until wounds are healed

and there are no other medical issues such as blood clots, infections or trapped pockets of fluid under the skin (seroma). Ask your surgeon when you can start scar massage after surgery. Gentle massaging with lotion 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 may be at risk of developing lymphoedema. Consider seeing a trained lymphoedema therapist for massage therapy. If you have developed lymphoedema, massage therapies such as manual lymphatic drainage may help control the symptoms. Therapists not trained in treating lymphoedema should avoid the affected area. Visit [lymphoedema.org.au](http://lymphoedema.org.au) to find a registered lymphoedema practitioner.

- ▶ See our *Understanding Lymphoedema* fact sheet.

**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.

## Medicinal cannabis

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Some people are interested in using cannabis for medical purposes. Cannabis is a plant that contains many types of chemicals called cannabinoids. These chemicals act on certain receptors found on cells in our body. Cannabinoids can also be made in a laboratory.

Medicinal cannabis contains standard measures of cannabinoids. Two cannabinoids commonly used in medicinal cannabis are delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

There is no evidence that medicinal cannabis can treat or cure cancer itself.<sup>5</sup> Research studies have looked at the potential benefits of using medicinal cannabis to relieve cancer symptoms and treatment side effects. There is some evidence that cannabinoids can help people who have found conventional treatment unsuccessful for some symptoms and side effects (e.g. chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting).

To date, published studies have shown medicinal cannabis to have little effect on appetite, weight, pain or sleep problems. Research is continuing in this area.

It is illegal to grow, possess or use cannabis in Australia. However, the Australian Government allows seriously ill people to access medicinal cannabis for medical reasons through registered medical practitioners. Most medicinal cannabis products in Australia are unapproved products. This means that before prescribing medicinal cannabis, your doctor needs to get approval from the government.

The laws about access to medicinal cannabis vary in each state and territory. These laws may affect whether it can be prescribed for you.

The TGA now allows low dose cannabis products containing up to 150 mg of CBD to be included on the ARTG (see page 18) and sold over the counter by pharmacists. As at the time of publication, no product has been approved by the TGA.

Medicinal cannabis may interact with some other drugs and also affect your driving ability. Talk with your doctor about any precautions you should take.

For more information, visit [tga.gov.au](http://tga.gov.au) and search for “medicinal cannabis”.

# Mindfulness

**What it is:** Mindfulness is the quality of being present and fully engaged in the present moment – free from distraction or judgement. Mindfulness practices can include focusing on the breath and observing each rise and fall, body scan meditations, and mindful walking. 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. By becoming aware of thoughts and feelings, you can choose how to handle them in the moment. This can increase attention and awareness, and strengthen wellbeing.

**What to expect:** Mindfulness can be practised sitting, standing or lying down. An instructor will support you to focus attention in a mindful way. This could be through following 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. Clinical practice guidelines include MBSR as an option for managing cancer-related fatigue.

Studies on mindfulness show it helps improve the quality of life of people with cancer, increases coping, and can reduce pain, anxiety, depression and nausea.



Check whether your cancer centre runs mindfulness programs. There are also online programs and smartphone apps you can download.

*“Even 13 years after I was treated for prostate cancer, in the back of my mind I still worry that it will come back. I did a mindfulness course to help me deal with this fear and found it really helpful.”* JOHN (PROSTATE CANCER)

## Music therapy

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

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

**What to expect:** You don't need to be musical to take part 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. Music therapy may be done in a group or one-on-one with a therapist.

**Evidence:** Some evidence-based studies in people with cancer have shown that music therapy can improve anxiety, depression, pain, fatigue and quality of life.

## 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 that each person has different nutritional needs.

**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 whole food and 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. For information on eating well during cancer, see pages 31–36.

## Qi gong

**What it is:** Qi gong – pronounced “chee goong” – is part of Chinese medicine. “Qi” means vital energy and “gong” means work. Qi gong combines movement with controlled breathing and meditation. It may be considered both a body-based practice and an energy therapy.

**Why use it:** Movements performed in qi gong are said to 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. It is believed that pressing on reflex points unblocks meridians, 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. It usually feels like a relaxing massage, although sometimes the therapist's touch can be subtle.

**Evidence:** Clinical practice guidelines include reflexology as an option for managing chemotherapy-related peripheral neuropathy, as well as pain felt during systemic treatment. Several clinical trials have looked at using reflexology for anxiety, fatigue, breathlessness and quality of life. Studies have involved small groups of people, so it is difficult to say whether the reflexology had any effect.

## Reiki

**What it is:** The term reiki is a Japanese word meaning universal life energy. It is a gentle hands-on therapy based on the belief that therapists can channel healing energy into another person to promote health.

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

**What to expect:** During a reiki session, you sit or lie down fully clothed. The therapist places their hands in a series of positions on or slightly above your body. The aim is to enhance the body's natural healing ability and promote wellbeing.

**Evidence:** There is no reliable evidence that reiki has any benefits. Anecdotal reports suggest that reiki is calming and relaxing, often helping to relieve pain and anxiety, reduce stiffness and improve posture.

## Relaxation and meditation

**What it is:** Relaxation is a process that uses slow breathing and muscle-loosening exercises to physically and mentally calm the body. Relaxation techniques include progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, deep breathing, massage, aromatherapy and yoga.

Meditation is the practice of focusing awareness and attention on the present moment and on the senses of the body. It is an important part of many religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, but you don't have to be religious to meditate. There are different types of meditation techniques, including breath work.

**Why use it:** Relaxation and meditation may help to release muscle tension, reduce anxiety and depression, and help improve quality of life. They may be used to help calm and relax the body and mind.



Some hospitals and cancer support groups offer relaxation and meditation groups. There are also many self-help podcasts, online videos and smartphone apps that will guide you through the different techniques. You could also listen to our relaxation and meditation podcast *Finding Calm During Cancer*.

**What to expect:** Serene music may be played to create a peaceful environment. The therapist will guide you through exercises to teach you the skills of relaxation and meditation, which you can then do yourself at home. Guided imagery uses sound and vision to encourage your imagination to create pleasant thoughts. After a period of relaxation, you will usually be prompted to stay awake to enjoy your relaxed state of mind. Relaxation and meditation can be done sitting or lying down.

**Evidence:** Clinical practice guidelines include offering a combination of guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation to people experiencing pain after cancer treatment. Clinical studies have shown that people being treated for cancer who practise relaxation have lower levels of anxiety, stress, pain and depression. Relaxation techniques have been shown to improve sleep.

## 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, chaplain or priest, 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 and connection from the congregation
- practical, emotional and spiritual support offered by members of your spiritual or religious community.

If you are not part of a formal community, you can find out more about your area of spiritual interest from a spiritual care practitioner, support groups, friendship groups, your local library or online. A spiritual care practitioner is often a member of the team at hospitals and cancer treatment centres.

**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.

## Tai chi

**What it is:** A part of Chinese medicine, 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 37).

**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. The class ends 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 may also help reduce fatigue, anxiety, depression and stress.

## 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 reducing fatigue and improving wellbeing. Evidence shows they should only 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 provide a herbal mixture aimed at 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 and capsules.

**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.



Using herbs is complex and it's best to see an experienced practitioner rather than trying to treat yourself. Some herbs may interact with conventional cancer treatment or medicines, and change how the treatment works or how the dose is absorbed. See pages 16-17 for tips on using herbs safely.

## Yoga

**What it is:** Yoga involves holding postures (asanas) with the body, being aware of breathing, 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 to more vigorous.

**Why use it:** To increase physical activity and improve emotional health.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. You may be asked to remove your shoes before entering the yoga room. You usually use a yoga mat – this may be provided or you may need to bring your own. Most classes last for around one hour. 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 designed for people during cancer treatment or recovery.

Some styles of yoga may not be suitable during some stages of cancer or depending on your abilities. Talk to the yoga instructor about

any precautions you should take and whether they can offer any modifications or support.

**Evidence:** Clinical practice guidelines on cancer pain include offering yoga to people experiencing pain related to taking aromatase inhibitors, as well as pain after treatment for some cancers. Clinical practice guidelines also suggest yoga as a way to manage cancer-related fatigue.

There is evidence that yoga has positive effects on decreasing stress and anxiety, reducing sleep disturbances, improving muscle strength and enhancing quality of life. The focus on breathing may also help reduce pain.

# Caring for someone with cancer

You may be reading this booklet because you are caring for someone with cancer. What this means for you will vary depending on the situation. Being a carer can bring a sense of satisfaction, but it can also be challenging and stressful. There is a wide range of support available to help you with the practical and emotional aspects of your caring role.

**Looking after yourself** – It is important to look after your own physical and emotional wellbeing. Make time each day to do something you find relaxing. Research shows that regular exercise can help with feelings of anger, stress, anxiety and depression. It can also improve fatigue and sleep. Even a brisk walk around the block offers benefits.

**Talk about how you're feeling** – Share your concerns with somebody neutral such as a counsellor or your doctor. Counselling may be available through your local Cancer Council or the Carer Gateway counselling service. Call 1800 422 737 or visit [carergateway.gov.au](http://carergateway.gov.au).

**Try complementary therapies** – Some of the complementary therapies described in this booklet may help carers cope with stress and fatigue. Relaxation and meditation techniques can help carers maintain their energy levels and improve their quality of life. Listen to our relaxation and meditation podcast *Finding Calm During Cancer* or call 13 11 20 to see if your local Cancer Council provides relaxation and meditation recordings. You could also try a local yoga or tai chi class. Some people find meaning and comfort through spiritual practices. It may help to talk about your feelings with a spiritual care practitioner or religious leader.

**Support services** – Support services such as Meals on Wheels, home help or visiting nurses can help you in your caring role. You can find local services, as well as information and resources, through the Carer Gateway. Call 1800 422 737 or visit [carergateway.gov.au](http://carergateway.gov.au).

**Support groups and programs** – Many cancer support groups and cancer education programs are open to carers as well as to people with cancer. There are also face-to-face, internet and telephone support groups specially for carers. They offer the chance to share experiences and ways of coping. Call Cancer Council 13 11 20 to find out about carer support groups. To connect online with other carers, visit the Cancer Council Online Community at [cancercouncil.com.au/OC](http://cancercouncil.com.au/OC).

**Cancer Council** – You can call Cancer Council 13 11 20 or visit your local Cancer Council website to find out more about carers' services.

► See our *Caring for Someone with Cancer* booklet.

*“I joined a tai chi class organised through the Carers Association and also attended their support workshops and relaxation sessions. The encouragement from other carers gave me the confidence boost I needed.”* ISABELLA (CARER)

# Support and information

## Professional and complementary therapist associations

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

Association	
Association of Massage Therapists	<a href="http://amt.org.au">amt.org.au</a>
Australasian Association of Ayurveda	<a href="http://ayurved.org.au">ayurved.org.au</a>
Australasian Integrative Medicine Association	<a href="http://aima.net.au">aima.net.au</a>
Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association	<a href="http://acupuncture.org.au">acupuncture.org.au</a>
Australian Feldenkrais Guild	<a href="http://feldenkrais.org.au">feldenkrais.org.au</a>
Australian Homoeopathic Association	<a href="http://homeopathyoz.org">homeopathyoz.org</a>
Australian Hypnotherapists Association	1300 55 22 54 <a href="http://ahahypnotherapy.org.au">ahahypnotherapy.org.au</a>
Australian Music Therapy Association	<a href="http://austmta.org.au">austmta.org.au</a>
Australian Natural Therapists Association	1800 817 577 <a href="http://australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au">australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au</a>

## Association

Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association

1800 422 885  
[anpa.asn.au](http://anpa.asn.au)

Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA)

[anzacata.org](http://anzacata.org)

Australian Physiotherapy Association

1300 306 622  
[australian.physio](http://australian.physio)

Australian Psychological Society

1800 333 497  
[psychology.org.au](http://psychology.org.au)

Australian Register of Homoeopaths

[aroh.com.au](http://aroh.com.au)

Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists

[aronah.org](http://aronah.org)

Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique

[austat.org.au](http://austat.org.au)

Australian Traditional-Medicine Society

1800 456 855  
[atms.com.au](http://atms.com.au)

Bowen Therapists Federation of Australia

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

Dietitians Australia

1800 812 942  
[dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://dietitiansaustralia.org.au)

Exercise & Sports Science Australia

[essa.org.au](http://essa.org.au)

International Aromatherapy and Aromatic Medicine Association

[iaama.org.au](http://iaama.org.au)

Laughter Yoga Australia

[laughteryoga-australia.org](http://laughteryoga-australia.org)

## Association

Massage & Myotherapy Australia	<a href="http://massagemyotherapy.com.au">massagemyotherapy.com.au</a>
Naturopaths & Herbalists Association of Australia	<a href="http://nhaa.org.au">nhaa.org.au</a>
Oncology Massage Training	<a href="http://oncologymassagetraining.com.au">oncologymassagetraining.com.au</a>
Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia	<a href="http://pacfa.org.au">pacfa.org.au</a>
Reflexology Association of Australia	<a href="http://reflexology.org.au">reflexology.org.au</a>
Reiki Australia	<a href="http://reikiaustralia.com.au">reikiaustralia.com.au</a>
Yoga Australia	1300 881 451 <a href="http://yogaaustralia.org.au">yogaaustralia.org.au</a>

## Useful websites

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

### Australian

Cancer Council Australia	<a href="http://cancer.org.au">cancer.org.au</a>
Cancer Council Online Community	<a href="http://cancercouncil.com.au/OC">cancercouncil.com.au/OC</a>
Cancer Council podcasts	<a href="http://cancercouncil.com.au/podcasts">cancercouncil.com.au/podcasts</a>
Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency	<a href="http://www.ahpra.gov.au">www.ahpra.gov.au</a>

## Australian

Cancer Australia [canceraustralia.gov.au](http://canceraustralia.gov.au)

Carer Gateway [carergateway.gov.au](http://carergateway.gov.au)

Chinese Medicine Board of Australia [www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au](http://www.chinesemedicineboard.gov.au)

National Institute of Complementary  
Medicine [nicm.edu.au](http://nicm.edu.au)

Therapeutic Goods Administration [tga.gov.au](http://tga.gov.au)

## International

American Cancer Society [cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

Cancer Research UK [cancerresearchuk.org](http://cancerresearchuk.org)

Complementary and Alternative  
Medicine for Cancer (Europe) [cam-cancer.org](http://cam-cancer.org)

Macmillan Cancer Support (UK) [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer  
Center (US) [mskcc.org](http://mskcc.org)

National Center for Complementary  
and Integrative Health (US) [nccih.nih.gov](http://nccih.nih.gov)

Natural Medicines (US) [naturalmedicines.  
therapeuticresearch.com](http://naturalmedicines.<br/>therapeuticresearch.com)

Office of Cancer Complementary  
and Alternative Medicine (US) [cam.cancer.gov](http://cam.cancer.gov)

Society for Integrative Oncology (US) [integrativeonc.org](http://integrativeonc.org)

## Support from Cancer Council

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

### Cancer Council 13 11 20



Our experienced health professionals will answer any questions you have about your situation and link you to local services (see inside back cover).

### Information resources



Cancer Council produces 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.

### Legal and financial support



If you need advice on legal or financial issues, we can refer you to qualified professionals. These services are free for people who can't afford to pay. Financial assistance may also be available. Call Cancer Council 13 11 20 to ask if you are eligible.

### Practical help



Cancer Council can help you find services or offer guidance to manage the practical impacts of cancer. This may include helping you access accommodation and transport services.

### Peer support services



You might find it helpful to share your thoughts and 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).

# Question checklist

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

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## Things to consider before using a complementary therapy

- What are the benefits?
  - What is the scientific evidence to support its use?
  - What are the risks and possible side effects of the therapy?
  - Are there any interactions with other medicines I am taking?
  - Will the therapy potentially harm me because of the therapist's advice to stop or delay conventional treatment?
  - Can I afford the cost of the therapy or medicines?
  - How long will I need to use the therapy for?
- 

## General questions to ask your treatment team

- 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, why and 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 choice of complementary therapies?
  - Would you be willing to talk to my complementary therapists?
  - Can you recommend any complementary therapists?
  - Does this hospital or treatment centre offer complementary therapies?
  - Can you give me a letter for my therapist outlining my treatment?
- 

## General questions to ask potential complementary therapists

- 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?
- Do you practise in an integrative way with conventional health practitioners?
- What exactly is the therapy? How does it work?

- How can the therapy you practise help me? How long will it take to work?
- 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 will I know the therapy is working?
- Are you able to do home visits if I am not well enough to attend your clinic?
- What do you charge for a consultation? Can I claim the cost on Medicare or from my health fund?
- How long are your consultations? 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?

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## Questions to ask about specific therapies

### 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?
- 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 qi gong, tai chi 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?

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## Questions to ask about specific therapies (*continued*)

### 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?

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## Questions about joining a clinical trial

- What therapies 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?
  - Who can I contact if problems occur while I am in the trial?
  - Can I be paid back for any out-of-pocket expenses?
  - Who is funding the trial? Has it been approved by an ethics committee?
  - Have the researchers declared any conflicts of interest? How will these be managed?
-

# Glossary

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## **active ingredient**

The ingredient 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 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**

Any of a range of therapies 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.

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## **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 and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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## **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 leaves and flowering tops of the cannabis plant. Cannabis contains active chemicals called cannabinoids. See also medicinal cannabis.

## **chemotherapy**

A cancer treatment that uses drugs to kill cancer cells or slow their growth.

## **Chinese herbal medicine**

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

## **Chinese medicine**

A broad system of holistic health care originating in Asia, which includes therapies

such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, qi gong and tai chi. 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.

#### **clinical trial**

A research study that tests new approaches to prevention, screening, diagnosis or treatment, to see if they are better than current approaches.

#### **coffee enema**

An unproven, alternative therapy that involves inserting coffee into the anus to open the bowels and cleanse the colon. It claims to remove toxins from the body but can be dangerous.

#### **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**

Any of a range of therapies used alongside 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 other pharmaceutical medicines.

#### **counselling**

A process of talking through personal issues with a trained professional to help you explore options and develop strategies.

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#### **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).

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#### **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 medicine**

When health care providers make decisions based on research studies that measure how well a particular treatment works.

#### **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).

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#### **Feldenkrais method**

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.

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### **Gerson therapy/Gerson diet**

An alternative nutritional therapy based on pure fruit and vegetable juices and coffee enemas that claims to detoxify the body, but can be dangerous.

### **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.

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### **healing touch**

The use of soft touch or passing hands over the body. It claims 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, used for food, medicine or aromatic oil.

### **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.

### **holistic care**

Care of the whole person. It can include different types of therapies and services to ensure that a person's physical, emotional, spiritual and practical needs are met.

### **homeopathy**

Based on the idea of treating "like with like". Aims to treat disease with very small amounts of natural substances that in larger amounts would produce symptoms of the disease.

### **hormone therapy**

A treatment that blocks the body's natural hormones, which sometimes help cancer cells grow. It may be 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.

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### **immunotherapy**

A type of drug treatment that use the body's own immune system to fight cancer.

### **infusion (herbal)**

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 to holistically care for cancer patients. Also known as integrative medicine.

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### **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**

Specialised massage designed to stimulate the flow of lymph in the body's tissues.

## **lymphatic system**

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

## **lymphoedema**

Swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid. This happens when lymph vessels or nodes can't drain properly because they have been removed or damaged.

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## **massage**

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

## **medicinal cannabis**

Cannabis that is prescribed for medical use.

## **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 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**

The quality of being present and fully engaged in the present moment ("mindful").

## **mineral oil**

A highly 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.

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## **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.

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## **oncologist**

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

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## **palliative care**

The holistic care of people who have a life-limiting illness, their families and carers. It aims to maintain quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, cultural, social and spiritual needs.

## **peripheral neuropathy**

Weakness, 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 damage can be a side effect of chemotherapy.

### **physiotherapist**

A university-qualified health professional who uses physical methods, such as massage and exercise, to help restore movement and mobility, and prevent further injury.

### **Pilates**

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

### **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.

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### **qi**

Vital energy or force. Pronounced “chee” and sometime spelt “chi”.

### **qi gong**

A form of movement therapy from 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 health and personal circumstances.

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### **radiation therapy**

The use of targeted radiation to kill or damage cancer cells so they cannot grow, multiply or spread. 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. It claims to turn blocked negative energy into positive energy.

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

Different techniques used to reduce muscle tension and stress. Examples include relaxation, meditation, and guided imagery.

### **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.

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### **scientific evidence**

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

### **side effect**

Unintended effect of a drug, herb or other treatment.

### **spiritual practices (spirituality)**

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

### **supportive care**

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

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### **tai chi**

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

### **touch therapies**

See body-based practices.

### **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.

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### **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 believed to contribute 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.

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### **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.

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### **whole medical systems**

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

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### **Yin and Yang**

An ancient Asian concept of balance used in Chinese medicine. It is based on the belief 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.

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### **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)
- 

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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 experienced health professionals 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.



If you need information in a language other than English, an interpreting service is available. Call 131 450.



If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can contact us through the National Relay Service. [communications.gov.au/accesshub/nrs](https://communications.gov.au/accesshub/nrs)

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*Cancer Council services and programs vary in each area.  
13 11 20 is charged at a local call rate throughout Australia (except from mobiles).*

For information & support  
on cancer-related issues,  
call **Cancer Council 13 11 20**

## Visit your local Cancer Council website

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**Cancer Council ACT**  
[actcancer.org](http://actcancer.org)

**Cancer Council NSW**  
[cancercouncil.com.au](http://cancercouncil.com.au)

**Cancer Council NT**  
[cancer.org.au/nt](http://cancer.org.au/nt)

**Cancer Council Queensland**  
[cancerqld.org.au](http://cancerqld.org.au)

**Cancer Council SA**  
[cancersa.org.au](http://cancersa.org.au)

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