

## **COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES TO WOMENS' CANCERS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Complementary or alternative cancer treatments should **only** be used in conjunction with orthodox medicine. Many complementary therapists will refuse to take on a cancer patient unless they consult an orthodox doctor as well. With orthodox treatments, there is a limit to how much [surgery](#), [chemotherapy](#), and [radiotherapy](#) a body can tolerate. The patient is receiving treatment on a physical level only.

**COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENTS** Complementary treatments used in conjunction with orthodox medicine offers a holistic approach to cancer care. 'Complementary' means it can be used alongside other forms of treatment. 'Alternative' treatments are those used instead of other forms of treatment. The complementary approach is as much about the attitude of the practitioners as it is about actual therapies. The holistic approach to care addresses the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs and does not focus on the medical / physical situation alone. Scientific studies now show that mental well-being is linked to physical well-being. When facing the challenge of cancer, mental and emotional well-being are threatened and this is where psychological approaches such as counselling and relaxation and visualisation techniques can be valuable in reducing stress levels. Complementary therapists and many doctors alike believe that cancer is the result of a slow weakening of the body's immune system over the years. This may be caused through deficiencies in diet and/or lifestyle but there is no hard evidence on this. A change in lifestyle or diet by itself may not automatically lead to recovery or remission but it can help a person to feel better and to be in a stronger position to get better. Improved well-being and a calmer state of mind may help to enable people to overcome their illness. Many people want to use a combination of therapies and, by participating in their healing process, feel a real sense that they are doing something to help themselves. This is a very important part of getting better and of being well within yourself. **DIET** A good diet isn't a guarantee of perfect health, but there is proof that unbalanced eating can upset the body and help disease to thrive. Therefore a well-balanced diet is important, either to help avoid cancer or to keep the body strong particularly when undergoing chemotherapy and other orthodox cancer treatments. There is, however, no point in trying to follow a diet if it is making you miserable. Any change in diet takes time to adapt to and you need to allow for this. However, if you are very unhappy about making changes, the upset may well do more harm than good.

- The "perfect" diet is one that is acceptable to you (and has to include a balance of protein, carbohydrate and fats).
- Some people need a bit of meat in their diet and do not thrive on a vegetarian diet.
- Some people do very well on a vegetarian diet , while others get more tired and lose weight. "A little of what you fancy" does you good!
- Take your time to get the advice and support you need.

The basic anti-cancer diet was devised by Dr Max Gerson who believed that the right nutrition is capable of cleansing the body of disease. The *Gerson Diet* was

developed for people with cancer. It is an extremely rigorous diet. It comprises of massive quantities of fruit and vegetable juices organically sourced – several pounds of fruit and vegetables are consumed every day. Coffee enemas are also employed to help detoxify the body. The diet can be very draining and difficult to carry out alone because of the effort involved in preparing the juices. It is a good idea to have a willing partner to help in the preparation of the juices. The diet does not suit everybody who tries it and there are those who have thrived on it. The best advice would be to contact your nutritionist or general practitioner and seek advice from them on a diet would best suit you. Additional information is also available from Slanu or the Bristol Cancer Help Centre. **VITAMINS, MINERALS AND ENZYMES**

There is evidence to suggest that certain vitamins and minerals help the immune system to deal with cancer and help to destroy cancer-causing substances found in food. The Bristol Cancer Help Centre has a database of over 5,000 studies on the impact of diet and nutrition on cancer. Some therapists believe that enzymes hold the highest possibility for the treatment of all cancers. **COUNSELLING**

Complementary therapies, like counselling, are particularly good at helping a person on a mental, emotional and spiritual level. In fact, many people suffer mentally with an illness like cancer much more than they suffer physically. With a professionally-trained counsellor, women can talk about their fears and sort out their feelings. A counsellor listens and helps you to resolve or come to terms with a problem.

**RELAXATION TECHNIQUES** Relaxation is an active process; it is something you 'do' rather than 'doing nothing' by watching T.V. or the like. True relaxation involves the mind and the body; it requires full attention and the more this is learned, the greater the benefits. Without you realising it, cancer can stress your body into a permanent state of tension. This can add to any anxiety that may be present. There are many forms of exercises or techniques. Most include learning to deepen the breath, becoming aware of muscle tension and letting it melt away. This experience can help people to think clearer and give a renewed sense of vitality. Regular practise is recommended – twice a day for fifteen minutes. Some relaxation experts say cancer patients should do three half-hour sessions a day. **MEDITATION**

Meditation is a way of resting the mind and helping to "centre" you in your daily lives by giving you a feeling of calm and balance. Even in the early stages of practising meditation people can experience a relaxing inner peace. For meditation you need a quiet place to sit – sitting is better. It's best to find a place where you know you won't be disturbed for at least twenty minutes. A darkened room is more relaxing and will help you concentrate. Meditation tapes are widely available. **HERBALISM**

Herbalism uses plants ( roots, leaves, stem and seeds) to treat illnesses and maintain health. They are given to help improve the body's natural functions and to restore harmony and balance. Herbalism is not a guaranteed cure for cancer, but some cancer tumours have been inhibited by herbal treatment. Self-medication should never be attempted, especially with herbs that you have picked yourself, as some are toxic and dangerous. **HOMEOPATHY**

Homeopathy is a popular and accepted form of complementary medicine. It is based on the natural law that 'like is cured with like'. The concept that the body is able to heal itself, if its own healing power is correctly stimulated, is fundamental to homeopathy. Remedies are given in a very dilute form. If these substances were given in larger doses they could cause the symptoms they are treating. As a result, symptoms may worsen slightly before they improve. Homeopathic treatment aims to eliminate the cause of a disease and not just the symptoms. The side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy such as nausea, mouth ulcers, weakness, depression and so on can sometimes be alleviated by homeopathic treatment. The results from homeopathy can include increased energy levels, reduced anxiety and better sleeping patterns.

**ACUPUNCTURE AND CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE** Acupuncture is based on Traditional Chinese medicine, which believes that we all have a life-force or energy (ch'i) which flows along certain pathways known as meridians. Health is affected and symptoms develop if these pathways are blocked. Acupuncture aims to unblock

these pathways and restore a natural balance of health through the insertion of sterilised needles into acupuncture points, (often on the forearms, hands, lower legs and feet). Acupuncture is used by orthodox and complementary therapists. Some people believe that acupuncture combined with Chinese herbal medicine can be effective in fighting cancer. Acupuncture is used to treat patients for pain relief and there are claims that it may reduce the toxic effects of cancer treatments like chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

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