

**MACMILLAN**  
CANCER SUPPORT

# CANCER AND COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES



# About this booklet

**The booklet is about complementary therapies. There are many different types of therapy. This booklet is about the most common types used by some people with cancer.**

We hope it gives you a balanced view of what is available and what is involved if you decide to try one.

We cannot advise you about the best treatment for you. You should talk to your doctor, who knows your medical history. It is important to tell your cancer doctor if you are thinking of using, or are already using, any complementary or alternative therapy. Always tell your therapist that you have cancer.

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

## How to use this booklet

This booklet is split into sections to help you find what you need. You do not have to read it from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 3 to help you.

On pages 82 to 89, there are details of other organisations that can help.

If you find this booklet helpful, you could pass it on to your family and friends. They may also want information to help them support you.

## Quotes

In this booklet, we have included quotes from people who have used complementary or alternative therapies. These are from people who have chosen to share their story with us. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)

## For more information

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

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

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

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations.

To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call **0808 808 00 00**.

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# ABOUT COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

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# Understanding different terms

In this information we use the following terms:

- conventional medical treatments
- complementary therapies
- alternative therapies.

It is helpful to understand what these terms mean.

## Conventional medical treatments

Conventional medical treatments are the medical treatments doctors use to treat people with cancer. They include:

- surgery
- radiotherapy
- chemotherapy
- hormonal therapies
- targeted therapies.

These treatments cure many cancers. Even when they cannot cure a cancer, they often help people live for longer or reduce their symptoms.

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

## Complementary therapies

People use complementary therapies with, or as well as, conventional medical treatments. Complementary therapies do not claim that they can treat or cure cancer. People might use complementary therapies to improve their physical or emotional health. Or they may use them to reduce cancer symptoms or the side effects of cancer treatments. There is more information about the different types of complementary therapies on pages 22 to 61.

Complementary therapy can be used with conventional medical treatments. This is called integrated or integrative medicine.

Some complementary therapies have been scientifically tested. This is to see how safe and effective they are, and if they have side effects. But it is often difficult to know how effective a complementary therapy is. This is because:

- studies testing this are usually small
- studies testing this often give different results
- it may be other factors that help with the side effects or symptoms of cancer, rather than the therapy itself.

**'Complementary therapies helped me to manage the physical side effects.'**

**Parul, diagnosed with breast cancer**

## Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies are often grouped together with complementary therapies. However, there are important differences between them. The same therapy can be complementary if it is used in one way, and alternative if used in another. There is more information about alternative therapies on pages 64 to 75.

Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional medical treatments. Some claim to treat, or even to cure, cancer. But no alternative therapies have been proven to cure cancer or slow its growth.

Alternative therapies are not scientifically tested and researched like conventional medical treatments are. Some may even be harmful.

We do not recommend using an alternative therapy instead of conventional cancer treatment. Doing this could reduce the chances of curing a cancer or living longer with cancer.



# Why people use complementary therapies

There are many reasons why people use complementary therapies. Some people find they help them cope with the stress of cancer and its treatments. Many therapies are relaxing and may improve your mood when you are not feeling your best.

Some people build a strong relationship with their complementary therapist, which can be another benefit. Having someone who listens to you may help you cope with difficult feelings.

Getting this support can help you feel more in control. Some people see using complementary therapies as a positive way of looking after themselves.

*'My advice is to treat yourself well. Make yourself feel as good as you possibly can. If you have the energy and you're able to physically and mentally, maybe do a course or learn something new that you hadn't thought about doing.'*

**Rocio, diagnosed with breast cancer**

You can do some complementary therapies as part of a group. This can be a good way to meet other people with similar experiences, in a positive setting.

Complementary therapies may help you:

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

# Choosing a complementary therapy

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

- what you would like
- how it might benefit you
- its availability
- any safety issues
- how much it costs.

There are organisations for individual complementary therapies. See page 18 for more details.

If you would like to know what complementary therapies other people have found helpful, contact a local cancer support group. Or if you have internet access, you can:

- join our Online Community to read about people's experiences – [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)
- contact a local support group to get and give support – [macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups)
- read interviews with people who have tried complementary therapies – [healthtalk.org](https://www.healthtalk.org)

## What you would like

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

You may want to:

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

It may also help to think about:

- if the treatments are free or, if you have to pay, how much you can afford
- if you want a one-off treatment or to do something regularly.

## Safety

Doctors do not usually mind their patients using complementary therapies. But some therapies may not be suitable to use alongside certain cancer treatments.

Before using a complementary therapy, talk to your healthcare team. Find out if it could have any harmful effects for you. It is very important to check whether it could:

- affect your cancer treatment
- make your cancer treatment less effective
- make side effects of your cancer treatment worse.

In this information, we have explained any safety issues of a complementary therapy. We cannot advise you about the best treatment for you. Only your cancer doctor can give you this information.

If you are already using a complementary therapy, make sure you tell your cancer doctor before you start cancer treatment. This is especially important if you are taking herbs, pills or medicines.

Before using a complementary therapy, tell the complementary therapist that you have cancer. This could affect the treatment or advice they give you. Some therapists may not treat someone with a diagnosis of cancer if they have not had training to help them work safely with you.

It is important not to use a therapist who claims to treat, prevent or cure cancer with complementary or alternative therapies. No reputable therapist would do this. There is no medical evidence to support these claims.

## Cost

Some complementary therapies are free through the NHS and some large cancer charities. Complementary therapies may be available at your hospital, hospice or GP surgery. You can ask your cancer doctor or specialist nurse about this. Some cancer support groups offer therapies free of charge, or at a reduced cost.

If you have to pay for complementary therapy, it can be expensive. The costs can add up over a long period of time. Check the costs beforehand and make sure you are being fairly charged. Some private therapists may offer a reduced cost based on your ability to pay. There are organisations that can tell you what the usual costs of complementary therapies are. See page 82 for more details on these organisations.



## Getting information

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

Ask to have a meeting with a complementary therapist. They can explain how they think the therapy could help you. We have some tips on choosing a therapist and suggestions of what to ask them. See page 19 for more information.

You may find it helpful to take a family member or friend with you to the meeting for support. It can also help to write down the questions that you want to ask beforehand. Take your time to decide whether you want to go ahead with the therapy.

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

You can also get information from library books and online.

Be careful when choosing what to read or believe on the internet. Some websites make claims that are not supported by evidence. And, others may be selling products to make money.

## Choosing a complementary therapist

When you choose a complementary therapist, it is best to find someone who is on a register. This will help make sure the person you see meets certain standards of practice.

There are two types of register:

- Accredited register – membership of these are voluntary. There are many accredited registers for different types of complementary therapies. A practitioner on an accredited register may have a quality mark. This may be displayed on a certificate of qualification, or in their place of work.
- Statutory register – these are regulated by UK law. Health professionals such as nurses, doctors and pharmacists must be on the register for their profession to be able to practice.

Registrants for both of these types of register should meet national standards of practice on issues such as:

- training
- safety
- confidentiality
- complaints.

All registrants must follow the code of conduct of their register. If you have any concerns about the conduct of a registrant, you can contact their register. They should deal with complaints fairly and as quickly as possible.

## Tips for choosing a therapist

When choosing a therapist:

- check what services your hospital provides first
- remember that some health professionals are trained in complementary therapies
- always use a qualified therapist who is on a statutory or accredited register
- ask how many years of training they have had and how long they have been practising
- ask how much they charge
- ask what training they have had about complementary therapies and cancer
- ask if they have indemnity insurance (in case of harm from complementary therapy side effects)
- be careful not to be misled by false promises – no trustworthy therapist would claim to be able to cure cancer.

A professional therapist should make you feel comfortable with them. Before your first treatment, they may ask you about your health, diet and lifestyle. This will help them to decide if they need to adapt the treatment to meet your needs. They may ask you to get permission from your cancer doctor before starting treatment.

If you ever feel uncomfortable or unhappy with your therapist, you have the right to stop your treatment at any time.



# TYPES OF THERAPY

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# Types of complementary therapy

There are many types of complementary therapy. Some are based on traditional medical systems outside of western medicine. These include Traditional Chinese Medicine and Indian Ayurvedic medicine.

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

- mind-body therapies
- massage and other touch-based therapies
- acupuncture
- therapies using herbs and plants
- therapies using supplements or diet.

# Mind-body therapies

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

The mind-body therapies used by people with cancer in the UK are:

- relaxation techniques
- meditation
- hypnotherapy
- art therapy
- music therapy
- movement therapies, such as tai chi and yoga.

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

You need to practise mind-body techniques regularly to get the best results. Using them for a long time is more effective than just doing them for a short time. You may find it more motivating to do the techniques in a group.

Some NHS services and support groups offer mind-body therapies. You can ask your hospital whether they provide them, or ask your GP if they can help you access a group. You can also call us on **0808 808 00 00** for details of support groups in your area.

## Relaxation techniques

Using relaxation techniques can calm the mind and reduce muscle tension. For some people, this helps reduce anxiety and stress.

There are three common relaxation techniques:

- Breathing exercises, where you focus on taking slow, deep, even breaths.
- Progressive muscle relaxation, where you tense and relax each group of muscles in turn until your whole body is relaxed.
- Guided imagery, where you focus on pleasant images to replace negative or stressful feelings. For example, you might imagine that the sun is shining on you, warming you and giving you strength.

Often, two or more relaxation techniques are used together.

Meditation (see opposite), hypnotherapy (see page 28), yoga (see page 31) and tai chi (see page 32) can also promote relaxation.

Almost everyone can use relaxation techniques. You can learn them in one-to-one sessions, as part of a group or at home using an app or CD. There is a list of organisations that provide relaxation apps or CDs on pages 82 to 85.

## Meditation

Meditation can help to relax and calm the mind. During meditation you learn to focus on the present moment. While doing this, you become aware of your feelings, thoughts, and the sensations in your body. You are encouraged to observe these calmly and without judgement. This helps to train your mind to remain calm and not to think or worry too much.

Possible benefits of meditation include:

- feeling relaxed
- feeling less anxious or depressed
- feeling less stressed
- being able to better manage chronic pain
- having more compassion for yourself and others.

**'Meditation gave me some time for myself and what I needed. It also made me address some difficult situations, which was hard, but the outcome was worth it.'**

**Clare, diagnosed with melanoma**

There are different types of meditation techniques. Some are spiritual, such as Buddhist meditation. A psychologist has developed a non-spiritual type of meditation. The aim is to help people manage problems such as anxiety, stress or chronic pain. This is called mindfulness meditation. Types of mindfulness meditation include:

- mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)
- mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT).

Mindfulness classes may be available through your hospital, GP or a cancer support charity. There are also organisations that can help you find meditation classes (see pages 82 to 85).

There are apps and CDs you can use to meditate at home. Some people find it helpful to meditate in a group until they are familiar with the technique.

**'Meditation helps me to acknowledge the fear and anxiety, but not to engage with it.'**

**Daloni, diagnosed with womb cancer**



## Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy can help you cope with specific phobias, such as a fear of needles. It can also encourage positive emotions, such as calmness and relaxation. Many people use hypnotherapy to help them make lifestyle changes, such as giving up smoking.

Sometimes it is used to reduce side effects of cancer treatment, such as nausea and vomiting or pain. But there is not enough evidence for doctors to recommend it as the main treatment for these problems.

A hypnotherapist works with you to create a helpful state of mind. They make suggestions to help change the way you deal with certain situations. You are always in control and can stop the session at any time by simply opening your eyes. See pages 82 to 83 for the contact details of hypnotherapists and other useful organisations.

## Art therapy

Art therapy aims to help you to deal with your feelings, rather than produce a work of art. Art therapy is used to help you:

- explore your feelings
- express yourself
- feel less anxious
- improve your self-confidence.

The art therapist may have training in psychotherapy. They will encourage you to communicate your feelings through painting, drawing or sculpting. You can have the therapy in a one-to-one session with the therapist or in a group.

Being creative may help you become more aware of difficult feelings and let go of them. You can then discuss these feelings in counselling or group sessions, if you want to.

You do not need to be able to draw or paint to take part. The art therapist will encourage you to doodle and express yourself freely.

Art therapy is not widely available for cancer patients on the NHS. We have details of how to find an art therapist near you on pages 82 to 83.

'I'd recommend an art therapy group to everyone. It doesn't matter if you can draw or not. The environment is really nice and it's like being a kid again – you can do what you like, create whatever you feel you want to.'

**Linda**

## Music therapy

Music therapy aims to improve your quality of life, by helping you communicate through music. You do not need to be able to play an instrument or read music. You can do music therapy on your own or as a group.

During the session, you work with a range of easy-to-use instruments to help show your feelings. If you find it difficult to talk about your feelings, music therapy may help you to express yourself.

Music therapy has also been shown to help relieve symptoms, such as pain. It may also help you cope with anxiety and fatigue.

Music therapy is not widely available for people with cancer on the NHS. The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) has details of how to find a music therapist near you (see page 82).

## Movement based therapies

Movement based therapies work directly on your body. They use movement, breathing exercises and a type of meditation or relaxation.

## Yoga

Yoga is a movement based mind-body therapy. There are different types of yoga. They generally use different yoga postures, and often combine this with breathing techniques and meditation. Some types of yoga use very gentle movement. Other types may involve more energetic movement.

Yoga is generally safe, but people with some types of cancer may need to change some of the positions to make them easier to do. It is important to tell your yoga teacher that you have cancer.

Yoga can help you cope with cancer and feel better generally. It may help to reduce sleep problems and fatigue. Yoga might also help to relieve menopausal symptoms, such as hot flushes and joint pains. More research into this is needed.

Some hospitals offer yoga classes. There is more information on how to find a yoga class near you on page 85.

**'While I was going through chemo I took up yoga. It helped give me an energy boost that was so needed.'**

**Bei, diagnosed with colon cancer**

## Tai chi and qi gong

Tai chi and qi gong (sometimes spelt chi kung) come from Chinese medical traditions.

Both tai chi and qi gong focus on building strength, balance and flexibility. They use slow, fluid movements with guided imagery and deep breathing (see page 24). They are suitable for most people. If you have fatigue, they can be a good way to get back into doing physical activity.

Together, the physical and mental exercises can help to:

- improve your general health
- give you a feeling of well-being
- reduce fatigue.

You can find tai chi or qi gong organisations on page 85.

# Massage and other touch therapies

Massage therapy is often offered as part of cancer care in cancer centres, hospices, community health services and some GP surgeries. It can be done by specialist massage therapists, physiotherapists, nurses or complementary therapists. In this information we use the term massage therapist to describe anyone who is trained in massage therapy.

A massage therapist can massage the whole body, or focus on one area such as the hands, face, shoulders or feet. This means you do not always need to remove clothing to have a massage.

## How massage therapy can help

There are different types of massage therapy. The type of massage a therapist recommends will depend on why it is being given.

Massage can be used to:

- relax your mind and body
- improve your mood
- relieve tension and pain in muscles or tissue
- improve circulation.

Some studies of people with cancer suggest that massage therapy may also help reduce anxiety, depression and fatigue.

## Manual lymphatic drainage

There is also a type of massage that can improve circulation in the lymphatic system. This is called manual lymphatic drainage. We have more information about lymphoedema in our booklet **Understanding lymphoedema** (see page 78). The lymphatic system helps protect us from infection and disease. It is made up of fine tubes called lymphatic vessels. These vessels connect to groups of small lymph nodes throughout the body. The lymphatic system drains lymph fluid from the tissues of the body before returning it to the blood. Manual lymphatic drainage encourages lymph to drain out of the affected area and into an area that drains normally.

## Having massage therapy

Massages can be soft and gentle, or more active. Some may be uncomfortable. Cancer doctors and complementary therapists usually advise you to try gentle massage and avoid vigorous, deep tissue massage. Your massage therapist can change the pressure for your comfort.

You might worry that massage could cause cancer cells to spread to other parts of the body. Research has not found any evidence of this happening, but massage therapists will avoid any areas affected by cancer, such as tumour sites or lymph nodes. Talk to your cancer doctor or specialist nurse if you are worried. If a massage therapist is not sure about where on your body it is safe to massage, they might choose to massage your hands or feet instead. The massage therapist must also be properly trained and qualified to treat people with cancer. They should have some knowledge of cancer and its treatments. They can sometimes teach family members or friends how to do basic massages, so they can support you at home.

Massages can last for different lengths of time. During cancer treatment, your cancer doctor may advise you not to have a massage that lasts longer than 20 minutes.

## Safety

During your therapy, it is important to avoid massage to certain areas. This includes:

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

It is also important to be particularly gentle if:

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

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

You can contact the General Council for Massage Therapies (GCMT) to find a trained massage therapist. Visit [gcmt.org.uk](http://gcmt.org.uk) for more details.

# Other touch-based therapies

There are many different types of touch-based therapy. In this information we explain the following therapies:

- shiatsu
- acupressure
- reflexology
- therapeutic touch.

These therapies are based on the idea that everyone has a special type of energy (chi or qi) that can be used to give health benefits. This comes from the theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

There is no evidence that this type of energy exists, or that it can have any effect on cancer. But, some people find these therapies relaxing and calming.

Some of these therapies do not use any, or use very little, physical contact. Others involve applying massage or pressure to certain areas of the body.

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

A therapy called aromatherapy is sometimes thought of as touch-based. We have more information about aromatherapy in the section on plant-based therapies (see page 43).

## Shiatsu

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

In a study of people with cancer who had Shiatsu in an NHS hospital, the people who took part said they felt less anxious and more relaxed after it. The reasons they gave for this included:

- spending time with the therapist
- being listened to
- being in a calm atmosphere during the therapy
- taking time to do something nice for themselves.

## Safety

As with other types of massage, it is important to think about your safety during the massage (see page 35).

## Acupressure

Acupressure is based on the same beliefs as Shiatsu and TCM around an energy in the body. The therapist applies pressure on specific areas of the body with the aim of helping a problem elsewhere in the body. The therapist can teach you how to do this to yourself, so you can continue the treatment at home.

One type of acupressure applies pressure on an acupressure point on the inner wrist. The point is called P6. Studies suggest that this may help reduce nausea after surgery. Pressure can be applied with fingers or wristbands.

Small studies have found that acupressure may also reduce fatigue. There is very little medical evidence to show that acupressure helps with any other symptoms.

## Reflexology

Reflexology is a type of foot or hand massage. The reflexologist applies gentle pressure to specific points on the feet or hands. This is based on the belief that different areas on the feet or hands represent, and are connected to, different parts of the body. But, there is no evidence to support this belief.

Many people say they feel more relaxed after reflexology, and use it to help reduce stress and anxiety.

A session lasts about 30 minutes. If you feel any discomfort during the session, tell your therapist.

Some reflexologists claim that reflexology can help to diagnose health problems, improve symptoms, such as feeling sick (nausea) and prevent illnesses. But, there is no convincing evidence that it has any of these effects. Reflexology should not be used in this way as part of cancer care.

'I was lucky enough to have four sessions of reflexology whilst I was having treatment. It was so relaxing.'

**Chandi**

## Therapeutic touch

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

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

Reiki is another type of therapeutic touch that was developed in Japan. You sit or lie down, and the therapist gently places their hands on or just above your body. They move their hands into a sequence of positions that cover most of the body. You do not need to remove any clothing. The therapist holds each position for about 2 to 5 minutes, or until they feel the flow of energy has slowed or stopped. You can get more information about therapeutic touch or Reiki from the UK Reiki Federation (see page 84).

# Acupuncture

There are two traditions of acupuncture. Traditional Chinese acupuncture and Western medical acupuncture.

Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) believe that everyone has a special type of energy (chi or qi) that flows through pathways in the body. They explain acupuncture as a technique for balancing the flow of energy. They believe that inserting needles at specific points along these pathways rebalances your energy flow.

Practitioners of Western medical acupuncture explain acupuncture based on a medical understanding of the nerves and chemicals in the body. They believe that placing needles under the skin at certain points stimulates nerves in the skin and muscle. Practitioners think that this encourages the body to release certain chemicals, such as endorphins, which act as natural painkillers and give a feeling of well-being.

Acupuncture is available in many NHS hospitals, pain clinics and hospices.

Some studies show that acupuncture may help to reduce nausea in people who have had chemotherapy. Acupuncture may also be used to relieve pain and other symptoms or side-effects.

The benefits of acupuncture are sometimes difficult to measure. Your doctor or acupuncturist can talk to you about what studies have been done and whether acupuncture may help in your situation.

Acupuncture does not have many side effects and, when done by a trained professional, is generally safe.

## Safety

If you are having, or have recently had, cancer treatment, always check with your cancer doctor before having acupuncture.

Some cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, can reduce the number of white blood cells in your blood. This can make you more likely to get an infection.

You should also avoid acupuncture if you have a very low number of platelets (blood cells that help blood to clot), or you bruise easily. These things can increase your risk of bleeding.

If you have had lymph nodes removed as part of cancer treatment, this can cause swelling in the area close by. For example, you might have swelling in your arm after breast cancer surgery. This is called lymphoedema. If you have, or are at risk of, lymphoedema, avoid acupuncture in the part of your body that is at risk.

# Herb and plant extracts

There are different types of therapies which use herb and plant extracts. This information explains:

- homeopathy
- aromatherapy
- flower remedies
- herbal remedies
- mistletoe.

These therapies are available in shops, on the internet, and from nutritionists, herbalists and homeopaths. They are mainly taken by mouth but can also be used as oils and creams.

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

Some herb and plant extracts may help with certain symptoms and side effects. But most have no effect. We have more information about signs and symptoms and side effects of cancer treatment (see page 78).

## Homeopathy

Homeopathy is based on the idea that like cures like. This means that a substance that causes a symptom can, when given in very small amounts, help stop that symptom.

Homeopathic remedies are mostly made of plant and mineral extracts. They come as tablets, liquids or creams. The remedies are usually very diluted, so they contain little, if any, of the original plant or mineral extract.

There has been a lot of research into the effectiveness of homeopathy. But there is no reliable evidence that homeopathy is an effective treatment. The National Institute for Health Care and Excellence (NICE) is an independent body that advises the UK government. They advise that homeopathy should not be available through the NHS. Because of this, it is not funded by the NHS in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. But some health boards in Scotland do provide homeopathy. If you live in Scotland and are interested in this type of therapy, your GP or cancer doctor can tell you if it is available.

In general, homeopathy products are safe to use alongside conventional cancer treatments.

## Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the use of concentrated natural oils extracted from plants. They are called essential oils. Aromatherapists believe they can benefit your body and mind.

Aromatherapists believe that each essential oil has its own properties. They think that the oils work when they are breathed in or absorbed through the skin.

The aromatherapist will choose the oil(s) they think will benefit you the most. For example, if you are having difficulty sleeping, they may choose an oil that is thought to help with relaxation and sleep.

Essential oils may be used:

- during massage
- in baths
- as creams
- through diffusers
- in nasal inhalers (aroma sticks).

Ask an aromatherapist for advice before using essential oils at home. You can also read the safety information on page 47.



Some marketing companies sell essential oils that they say can be taken by mouth. But this can be very dangerous and should be avoided. Essential oils are very concentrated. When taken by mouth there is a risk they may cause liver damage, stomach irritation or fits (seizures). The Aromatherapy Council UK is a professional body for aromatherapists in the UK. Their guidance says clearly that aromatherapists in the UK are not qualified to give essential oils internally, without further medical training. It also states that aromatherapists are not insured if the oils cause any harm.

Aromatherapy massages usually last for about 60 minutes. But they can be longer or shorter than this. Your aromatherapist dilutes the essential oils with another oil. They then massage this into your skin. They will tell you what to expect before they start.

There is no medical evidence that aromatherapy reduces cancer symptoms or improves the side effects of treatment. But many people find it a relaxing and enjoyable experience. For more information about aromatherapy and to find a trained therapist, visit [aromatherapycouncil.org.uk](http://aromatherapycouncil.org.uk)

## Safety

It is important to tell the aromatherapist about any medicines you are taking and give them all your medical details. They use very low-strength oils for people with cancer. But some oils can have physical effects on the body. For example, some oils may affect your blood pressure.

If you are having cancer treatment, always check with your cancer doctor before you have aromatherapy. It is usually fine to have aromatherapy and massage during radiotherapy, as long as it is not used on the area being treated.

## Flower remedies

Flower remedy practitioners believe that the cause of an illness is emotional imbalance. Each flower remedy aims to cure a specific type of emotional problem.

Flower remedies are considered safe. Some people feel they help reduce anxiety and help them feel better. But there is no medical evidence to show that this is true. There is no evidence that emotional imbalances can cause cancer, or that flower remedies are an effective treatment for cancer.

Flower remedies are prepared by placing flower heads into spring water under direct sunlight. Or they can be made by heating the plant in spring water. The plant material is removed. The water is then diluted with more water, or with alcohol (usually brandy). You take the remedy as a liquid.

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

### Safety

Flower remedies are often diluted in alcohol, so if you do not drink alcohol you may choose not to use them.

## Herbal remedies

Herbal remedies use plants or plant extracts to treat illnesses and promote health. Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine also use herbs.

Herbs can be:

- boiled in water and drunk as a tea
- mixed in an alcohol solution
- made into tablets, creams or ointments.

Although some people find them helpful, there is very little evidence to show the effectiveness of herbal medicines.

Commonly used herbs include the following:

- Ginger, which can be used to relieve feelings of sickness (nausea).
- St John's Wort, which can be used to treat a low mood and mild to moderate depression. It can interact with many prescription medicines. Always check with your cancer doctor or pharmacist before using it.

## Taking herbs during cancer treatment

We know about some interactions between herbs and cancer treatments. But a herbal remedy may contain many substances, and all its active ingredients may not be known. This means we do not know all of the possible effects the remedy could have on other medicines or treatments.

Many doctors advise that you should avoid herbal remedies for a few weeks before and after cancer treatment. Some herbs can make cancer treatments less effective or increase their side effects. These are some examples:

- St John's Wort affects many prescribed medicines. It can also reduce the effectiveness of the chemotherapy drug irinotecan.
- Green tea supplements may make the targeted therapy drug bortezomib (Velcade®) less effective.
- Green tea supplements can increase the side effects of the chemotherapy drug irinotecan and the hormonal therapy tamoxifen.
- Garlic supplements and evening primrose oil may affect blood clotting. You should not use them before having surgery.

We have more information about these drugs on our website (see page 78).

## Safety

Although plants and herbs are natural, this does not mean they are always safe. Natural substances can have strong side effects. Many medicines, including some chemotherapy drugs, are made from plants.

It is important to understand that something that might be safe in lower doses can be harmful in higher doses. For example, drinking green tea is generally safe but green tea supplements can contain much higher doses. Taking them can sometimes cause serious liver problems.

If you choose to take herbal remedies, it is important to use them safely:

- Be aware of any side effects that herbal remedies may cause.
- Understand that some herbal remedies could interact with any medicines you take.

It is best to only buy products that have the traditional herbal registration (THR) mark. This shows the products have been tested for quality and safety. Herbal products that you can buy in health food shops and pharmacies must meet quality standards. But herbal products that are sold online or made for personal use do not have the THR mark. There are no checks on how these products are made or guarantees of what they contain. For example, some unlicensed Traditional Chinese Medicines have been found to contain toxic substances.

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

The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre can give you safety information about individual herbs (visit [mskcc.org](https://www.mskcc.org)). It is a reliable website. If you are seeing a herbalist, check that they are registered with an accredited body (see page 18).

## Mistletoe (Iscador<sup>®</sup>, Eurixor<sup>®</sup>)

Mistletoe comes from a group of therapies called anthroposophical medicine. These therapies aim to combine conventional medicine with complementary therapies.

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

It is claimed that mistletoe may have various effects for people living with cancer. These include:

- improving your quality of life
- reducing the side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

There is no reliable medical evidence to show that mistletoe is effective in treating cancer, or that it can reduce the side effects of treatment. This means that it is not advisable to use mistletoe as an alternative to cancer treatments.

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

## Safety

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

Because mistletoe may stimulate the immune system, it could reduce the effectiveness of some medicines. This includes immunosuppressants, which people take after a donor stem cell or bone marrow transplant.

It is important to check with your cancer doctor before using mistletoe.

# Diet and food supplements

You might make changes to your diet after a cancer diagnosis to help you stay as healthy as possible. You may also have to change your diet to lose or gain weight, or because of symptoms from surgery or other treatments.

There is not one diet that everyone with cancer should use. It depends on whether you are below or above a healthy weight for your height and what symptoms and side effects you have.

You may be able to follow a standard healthy diet if:

- you are not struggling with your weight
- you do not have any unwanted symptoms or side effects in your digestive system.

We have more information about this in our booklet **Healthy eating and cancer**. And you can watch our healthy eating video at [macmillan.org.uk/dietandlifestyle](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/dietandlifestyle)

Your healthcare team might refer you to a dietitian for advice. This may happen if you:

- are underweight
- find it difficult to maintain a healthy weight
- have problems with symptoms and side effects when you eat or drink.

We have more information about a building-up diet and recipes for people affected by cancer. If you are underweight, or struggle to eat, you may also find our booklets **The building-up diet** and **Recipes for people affected by cancer** helpful (see page 78). These recipes are packed full of calories and protein which are required by people with cancer.

## Dietary supplements

Sometimes we need extra nutrition when we cannot get enough nutrition through our diet alone. This is called supplementary nutrition. It can come as milkshakes, yoghurts, juices, powders and soups. Your cancer doctor may prescribe these if you need extra carbohydrates, protein or fat. The supplements sometimes have extra vitamins and minerals added to them. Dietitians call these supplements oral nutrition support, or sip-feeds.

## Food supplements

Food supplements come as tablets, capsules, powders and tonics. They include vitamins, minerals, fats, proteins and plant extracts.

You may be at risk of developing a lack of (deficiencies in) vitamins and minerals if you have:

- not eaten well for a long time
- had surgery to your digestive system.

Your cancer doctor can prescribe vitamins and minerals. If you are not able to eat a healthy balanced diet, your doctor may prescribe a multi-vitamin and multi-mineral supplement to take every day. This will give you the full amount of the nutrients you need. This is called the Nutrient Reference Value (NRV).

Some people think that if something is good for you in small amounts, taking larger amounts is even better. But this is not always true. Nutrients are essential for our health in small amounts. But they can be harmful and cause unpleasant side effects when taken in large amounts. And some may affect cancer treatments or make them less effective.

## Safety

If you are thinking of taking food supplements, it is important to talk to your cancer doctor or specialist nurse first.

Despite a lot of research into cancer and food supplements, there is no good evidence to suggest that taking them can help treat cancer or stop it from coming back. But research has found that taking certain supplements could increase the risk of some cancers developing.

## Antioxidant food supplements

Antioxidants include:

- vitamins A, C and E
- coenzyme Q10
- selenium
- some plant extracts.

These are some of the most common dietary supplements. They can help to prevent cell damage.

## Probiotics

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts which are promoted as having various health benefits. They are usually added to yoghurts or taken as food supplements.

It is thought that probiotics help restore the natural balance of bacteria in your gut (including your stomach and bowel). This could be when the balance has been affected by an illness or a treatment. They are thought to be safe for people who have strong immune systems.

Some research suggests that certain probiotics are useful in treating side effects caused by some cancer treatments. But there is also a risk that probiotics could cause an infection from the yeast or bacteria in the product. This is because some cancer treatments can lower the number of white blood cells in the body, which fight infection. Because of this risk, it is important to talk to your cancer doctor before taking any probiotics or live yoghurts.

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

## Safety

Always tell your cancer doctor if you are thinking of taking any food supplements. Antioxidants can help prevent cell damage and help with any side effects of cancer treatment. But there is also evidence that taking high-dose antioxidant supplements during cancer treatment may make cancer treatment less effective. Until more evidence is available, your cancer doctor may recommend that you do not take antioxidant supplements during your treatment, unless it is as part of a clinical trial.

You do not need to limit antioxidants that are found naturally in food.

## Choosing a nutrition professional

Choosing the right person to get help and advice from can be difficult. Many people claim to be experts in nutrition but have very limited knowledge and offer no protection to the public.

### Registered dietitians

A registered dietitian (RD) is the only qualified health professional that can assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems. They can do this at an individual and wider public health level. They work with both healthy and sick people. Dietitians use current medical evidence to give specific advice to people with eating or weight problems. They also give advice on healthy eating in general. Some dietitians specialise in helping people affected by cancer. Dietitians are regulated by law and must meet a national standard of practice from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

### Nutritionists

Nutritionists are only qualified to provide information about food and healthy eating. They cannot join the HCPC. The job title of nutritionist is not protected by law. This means anyone can call themselves a nutritionist. Some dietitians may also call themselves a nutritionist, as it is a better understood job title.

### Nutritional therapists

Nutritional therapists are different again. Some nutritional therapists are qualified to provide information on healthy eating, but they are not regulated by law and cannot join the HCPC. Some nutritional therapists may try to improve your health using methods such as detoxing, or suggesting you take high-dose vitamins. These types of diet are not recommended for people with cancer.

# Talking, counselling and support groups

Talking, counselling and support groups are not complementary therapies. We have included them because many people use them as a further source of support during and after treatment.

Talking about thoughts and feelings can help people cope with stress, anxiety and difficult feelings. You may find that it helps to talk openly with your family and friends. The healthcare professionals caring for you and who know your situation can also be a good source of support. You can ask your cancer doctor to put you in contact with the psychological support services at your hospital.

Our booklet **Talking about cancer** gives information on the benefits of talking. Your family, friends and carers may find our booklet **Talking with someone who has cancer** useful when they are supporting you (see page 78).

'I had become angry and aggressive because my self-confidence had taken such a knock. I did seek counselling and it was extremely beneficial.'

**Elvin, diagnosed with prostate cancer**

## Counselling

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

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

## Support groups

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

This is different from a self-help group. At a support group, the therapist leading the group knows about each person's problems. This means they can guide the discussion so that it benefits everyone.

## Self-help groups

This is an organised group where people with cancer and their families meet others in a similar situation. This is often the first chance people have to discuss their experiences with other people living with cancer. These groups can be a source of information and support. They are also an opportunity for people to talk about their feelings. They often offer different techniques and coping strategies, together with relaxation or visualisation.

Some groups are run in a hospital. They may be organised by doctors, nurses, counsellors or psychotherapists. More commonly, people with cancer run the groups.

If you are interested in joining a group but are unsure about whether it would help, ask some questions about it first. Or you could go to one meeting to see what it is like before joining. You may feel more comfortable if you take a family member or friend with you. But if you feel it is not for you, you do not have to go again. You may find it more helpful and supportive to find someone you can speak with one-to-one, on a regular basis.

## Share your experience

Having cancer is a life-changing experience. When treatment finishes, many people find it helps to talk about it and share their thoughts, feelings and advice with other people. Hearing about how you have coped, what side effects you had and how you managed them may help someone in a similar situation. We can help you share your story. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit our website **[macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)** for more information.



# ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

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# What are alternative therapies?

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

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

False claims about alternative therapies have sometimes led people to refuse cancer treatments that could have helped them. No reputable alternative therapist will claim to be able to cure cancer.

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

Claims about an alternative therapy may be based on the results of tests that were done on cancer cells in a laboratory. But the human body is much more complicated than the controlled conditions of cells in a laboratory. Most treatments that seem to work when tested in the laboratory do not work when used for people with cancer. This is why it takes so long to develop new cancer treatments.

Very few suppliers of alternative medicines have done scientifically-controlled clinical trials for their products. Many alternative therapies rely on individual stories or testimonials as evidence that they work. This is the least reliable type of evidence. This is because there is no way of checking whether the effect someone has described is because of the alternative therapy or something else. It is also not usually possible to check whether the person's story is reliable, or even that they existed or had cancer.

## Safety

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

Claims that an alternative therapy has a positive effect on treating cancer in a laboratory do not mean it will have any effect on someone with cancer.

## Why people use alternative therapies

There are many reasons why some people choose to try an alternative therapy. Sometimes it is because they feel that cancer treatments cannot help them, or could be harmful.

The idea of having cancer treatments and unpleasant side effects can be frightening. However, many people with an early-stage cancer can be cured by cancer treatments.

If you have been told by your doctors that the cancer cannot be cured, you may find it very hard to accept. Some people in this situation think about using an alternative therapy. However, if a cancer cannot be cured by cancer treatment, it will not be cured with an alternative therapy. Using some alternative therapies may not do any harm, but others could be very harmful.

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

## Second opinion

If your doctor tells you that further treatment will not help control the cancer, you may find it very hard to accept. This is understandable. In this situation, you might find it helpful to get a second medical opinion.

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

Our booklets **Coping with advanced cancer** and **Understanding cancer research trials (clinical trials)** have more information (see page 78).

## **Get advice and support before using an alternative therapy**

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

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

# Types of alternative therapy

There are many types of alternative therapy. In this information we explain the alternative therapies that are most well-known to people with cancer. These include:

- amygdalin (Laetrile<sup>®</sup>, Vitamin B17)
- Essiac<sup>®</sup> (Vitaltea<sup>®</sup>, Flor-essence<sup>®</sup>)
- cannabis oil or CBD oil
- metabolic therapy
- diets that claim to treat cancer
- megavitamin therapy.

If you would like to talk to someone about alternative therapies, you can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Amygdalin (Laetrile<sup>®</sup>, Vitamin B17)

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

A man-made form of amygdalin is called Laetrile<sup>®</sup>. Some suppliers call it vitamin B17. But it is not actually a vitamin.

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

## Safety

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

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

## Essiac® (Vitaltea®, Flor-essence®)

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

Essiac affects an enzyme in the body that regulates hormones and vitamin D. It also affects how the body deals with toxins. This means that taking Essiac with other cancer treatments could make them less effective or increase side effects.

## Safety

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

## Cannabis oil and CBD oil

Cannabis is made up of substances called cannabinoids. Two of the main cannabinoids are:

- THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) – it is illegal to use this in the UK
- CBD (cannabidiol) – it is legal to use this in the UK.

Many types of cannabis oil are sold online. CBD oil is also sold in some shops, such as health food shops.

Cannabis oil can contain different amounts of THC and CBD.

CBD oil in its pure form does not contain THC. This means it does not have any psychoactive effects (it does not make you feel stoned). CBD oil is not a controlled substance under the Misuse of Drugs Act. It can be sold in the UK as a food supplement if the seller does not make any claim about its medicinal properties.

Scientists have researched THC and CBD in the laboratory to see if they could have any role in the treatment of cancer. The results have been mixed. There is no reliable, medical evidence to show whether cannabis in any form can effectively and safely treat cancer in humans.

If you are thinking about using cannabis oil or CBD oil, there are some important things to consider:

- THC and products that contain THC are illegal in the UK.
- THC in cannabis oil can cause side effects, such as an increased heart rate, dizziness, hallucinations, paranoia and feeling stoned.
- CBD and THC can affect how some medicines work.

## Metabolic therapy

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

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

- a diet of raw fruit and vegetables
- a diet with no processed foods or salt
- taking vitamin and mineral supplements
- taking enzymes or chemical supplements
- having coffee enemas.

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

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

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

## Safety

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

## Diets that claim to treat cancer

There are a number of diets, in addition to the Gerson diet (see page 71), that claim to treat cancer. Some claim to remove toxins from the body. Many of these diets are vegetarian or vegan. They involve eating food that is raw, sugar-free and low in salt. Sometimes vegetable or fruit juices, and high doses of vitamins, minerals or enzymes are used. Other diets are based on claims that some foods feed cancer, or affect the pH levels (acidity) of the body.

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

Some diets are high in fibre and low in calories and protein. These are not suitable if you have problems maintaining your weight because of cancer or its treatment. If you are underweight, you need protein and calories from any source of food. Talk to your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or dietitian before cutting out any food group from your diet.





## Safety

If you choose to follow a diet that cuts out some food types, it is important to make sure you are not missing out on important nutrients. For example, if you follow a dairy-free diet it is important to replace the calcium that you would usually get from dairy products, with other calcium-rich foods.

## Megavitamin therapy

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

## Safety

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

High-dose vitamin C is not suitable for people who have:

- kidney problems
- a condition that causes iron overload (haemochromatosis)
- a G6PDH deficiency.

Talk to your cancer doctor if you have any of these problems and are thinking of taking high-dose vitamin C.



# FURTHER INFORMATION

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# About our information

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

## Order what you need

You may want to order more booklets or leaflets like this one. Visit [be.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.be.macmillan.org.uk) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

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

## Online information

All our information is also available online at [macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support) You can also find videos featuring stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

## Other formats

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

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- eBooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats)

If you would like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

# Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you.

## Talk to us

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

### Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

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

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

## Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Talk to others

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

## Support groups

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

## Online Community

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

## The Macmillan healthcare team

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

## Book reviews

Our volunteers review many books about cancer. These include people's stories of living with cancer, and books for children. Visit [publications.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/publications) and search 'book reviews'.

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

Mal

## Help with money worries

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

### Financial guidance

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

### Help accessing benefits

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

### Macmillan Grants

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

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants.

We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

## Help with work and cancer

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

### Work support

Our dedicated team of work support advisers can help you understand your rights at work. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a work support adviser (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

### Macmillan Organiser

This includes a records book to write down information such as appointments, medications and contact details. You can also download the app on IOS or Android.

# Other useful organisations

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

## General complementary therapy organisations

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

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

### **Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CHNC)**

**Tel** 0203 668 0406

**Email** [info@cnhc.org.uk](mailto:info@cnhc.org.uk)

**www.cnhc.org.uk**

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

## Acupuncture

### **British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS)**

**Tel** 0207 713 9437

**Email** [admin@thebmas.com](mailto:admin@thebmas.com)

**www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk**

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

## Art and music therapy

### **British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT)**

**Tel** 0207 837 6100

**Email** [info@bamt.org](mailto:info@bamt.org)

**www.bamt.org**

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

## **British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)**

**Tel** 0207 686 4216

**Email** [info@baat.org](mailto:info@baat.org)

**www.baat.org**

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

## **Herbal medicine**

### **National Institute of Medical Herbalists**

**Tel** 0139 242 6022

**Email** [info@nimh.org.uk](mailto:info@nimh.org.uk)

**www.nimh.org.uk**

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

### **The Bach Centre**

**Tel** 0149 183 4678

**www.bachcentre.com**

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

## **Homeopathy**

### **The Society of Homeopaths**

**Tel** 0160 481 7890

**Email**

[info@homeopathy-soh.org](mailto:info@homeopathy-soh.org)

**www.homeopathy-soh.org**

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

## **Hypnotherapy**

### **British Hypnotherapy Association**

**Tel** 0208 942 3988

**Email**

[thebha@virginmedia.com](mailto:thebha@virginmedia.com)

**www.hypnotherapy-association.org**

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

## **British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis**

**Tel** 0770 249 2867

**Email** [natoffice@bscah.co.uk](mailto:natoffice@bscah.co.uk)

**www.bscach.com**

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

## **Meditation**

### **BeMindful – part of the UK charity, The Mental Health Foundation**

**www.bemindful.co.uk**

A good source for evidence on the benefits of mindfulness meditation. Offers an online mindfulness course. You can search for a mindfulness teacher who follows the Good Practice Guidelines developed by the UK Network of Mindfulness-based Teacher Training organisations.

## **Headspace**

**www.headspace.com**

A website that teaches meditation and mindful living through a free introductory course. For a subscription, you can access hundreds of themed sessions on topics such as stress, sleep, how to focus and anxiety.

## **Reflexology**

### **Association of Reflexologists**

**Tel** 0182 335 1010

**Email** [info@aor.org.uk](mailto:info@aor.org.uk)

**www.aor.org.uk**

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

## **Reiki**

### **UK Reiki Federation**

**Tel** 0126 4791 441

**Email** [enquiry@reikifed.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@reikifed.co.uk)

**www.reikifed.co.uk**

An independent federation of individuals who have been attuned to Reiki. They aim to provide support and guidance to Reiki professionals and the public.

## Shiatsu

### **The Shiatsu Society**

**Tel** 0178 854 7900

**www.shiatsusociety.org**

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

## **Traditional Chinese Medicine**

### **Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine**

**Tel** 0160 392 7420

**Email** herbmed@rchm.co.uk

**www.rchm.co.uk**

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

### **The Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture UK**

**Tel** 0208 457 2560

**Email** info@atcm.co.uk

**www.atcm.co.uk**

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

## **Yoga**

### **British Wheel of Yoga**

**Tel** 0152 930 6851

**Email** office@bwy.org.uk

**www.bwy.org.uk**

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

## General cancer support organisations

### Cancer Black Care

**Tel** 0208 961 4151

**www.cancerblackcare.org.uk**

Offers UK-wide information and support for people from Black and ethnic minority communities who have cancer. Also supports their friends, carers and families.

### Cancer Focus Northern Ireland

**Helpline** 0800 783 3339

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 1pm)

#### **Email**

nurseline@cancerfocusni.org

**www.cancerfocusni.org**

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland.

### Cancer Research UK

**Helpline** 0808 800 4040

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

**www.cancerresearchuk.org**

A UK-wide organisation that has patient information on all types of cancer. Also has a clinical trials database.

### Cancer Support Scotland

**Tel** 0800 652 4531

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

**Email** info@

cancersupportscotland.org

**www.cancersupportscotland.org**

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

### Maggie's Centres

**Tel** 0300 123 1801

#### **Email**

enquiries@maggiescentres.org

**www.maggiescentres.org**

Has a network of centres in many locations throughout the UK. Provides free information about cancer and financial benefits. Also offers emotional and social support to people with cancer, their family, and friends.

**Penny Brohn UK****Helpline** 0303 300 0118

(Mon to Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)

**Email**

helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk

**www.pennybrohn.org.uk**

Offers physical, emotional and spiritual support across the UK, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

**The Memorial Sloan  
Kettering Cancer Center**  
**www.mskcc.org**

Gives research-based evidence on complementary and alternative therapies.

**Tenovus****Helpline** 0808 808 1010

(Daily, 8am to 8pm)

**Email**

info@tenovuscancercare.org.uk

**www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk**

Aims to help everyone in the UK get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research and provides support such as mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, benefits advice and an online 'Ask the nurse' service.

**General health information****Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland****www.hscni.net**

Provides information about health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

**NHS.UK****www.nhs.uk**

The UK's biggest health information website.

Has service information for England.

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

NHS health information site for Wales.

**NHS Inform**

**Helpline** 0800 22 44 88 (Mon to Fri, 8am to 10pm, and Sat and Sun, 9am to 5pm)

**www.nhsinform.scot**

NHS health information site for Scotland.

## **Patient UK** **www.patient.info**

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

## **Counselling**

### **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

**Tel** 01455 883 300

**Email** [bacp@bacp.co.uk](mailto:bacp@bacp.co.uk)

**www.bacp.co.uk**

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services across the UK. You can search for a qualified counsellor at **[itsgoodtotalk.org.uk](http://itsgoodtotalk.org.uk)**

### **UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)**

**Tel** 0207 014 9955

**Email** [info@ukcp.org.uk](mailto:info@ukcp.org.uk)

**www.psychotherapy.org.uk**

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

### **Emotional and mental health support**

#### **Mind**

**Helpline** 0300 123 3393 (Mon to Fri, 9am to 6pm)

Text 86463

**Email** [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

**www.mind.org.uk**

Provides information, advice and support to anyone with a mental health problem through its helpline and website.

## Advanced cancer and end-of-life care

### Marie Curie

**Helpline** 0800 090 2309

(Mon to Fri, 8am to 6pm,  
and Sat, 11am to 5pm)

**[www.mariecurie.org.uk](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk)**

Marie Curie nurses provide free end-of-life care across the UK.

They care for people in their own homes or in Marie Curie hospices, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

## Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photos are of models.

## Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by Saul Berkovitz and Sosie Kassab.

With thanks to: Christine Clarke, Macmillan Specialist Oncology Pharmacist; Dr Jacqueline Filshie, Consultant in Anaesthesia and Pain Management; Dr Caroline Hoffman, Clinical and Research Director; Dr Jacqui Stringer, Clinical Lead Support Care Services; and Tara Whyand, Oncology Dietician.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)

## Sources

We have listed a sample of the sources used in the booklet below. If you would like more information about the sources we use, please contact us at [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)

Cassilieth B. *The Complete Guide to Complementary Therapies in Cancer Care: Essential Information for Patients Survivors and Health Professionals*. 2011.  
Ernst E, et al. *Oxford Handbook of Complementary Medicine*. 2008.

# Can you do something to help?

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

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



## **Share your cancer experience**

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

## **Campaign for change**

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

## **Help someone in your community**

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

## **Raise money**

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

## **Give money**

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

## **Call us to find out more**

# 0300 1000 200

[macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved](http://macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved)

## Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please accept my gift of £ \_\_\_\_\_

(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /  
Charity Voucher made payable to  
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity  
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

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## Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

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

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



If you'd rather donate online go to [macmillan.org.uk/donate](https://macmillan.org.uk/donate)

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

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

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

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** (7 days a week, 8am to 8pm) or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

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

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

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