

10 Types of Complementary Cancer Therapy



Complementary therapies are used along with standard healthcare. Many people with cancer wonder about these types of therapy. They want to do everything they can to feel better and treat the cancer. Right now, there is not a lot of scientific proof about which complementary cancer therapies are safe and which may work. Learning about each type can help you talk with your healthcare team. Below are 10 common types:

1. Religious and spiritual practices

Examples are prayer, laying on of hands, or beliefs about the religious and spiritual realm. Some studies suggest that religious practices help people feel better and have a better quality of life.

2. Psychosocial therapy and support

These may address both mental and emotional aspects of cancer. They include support groups, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, imagery, and art therapy. They include types of self-analysis and self-expression, such as journal writing. Social factors include support networks and taking part in a wide range of social and community activities. Many of these have been shown to help manage mood, sleep, depression, and stress.

3. Nutritional therapies

These include special diets and supplements. Nutrition therapy may mean following a basic, vegetable-based diet. Other examples are very restrictive diets and supplement programs. Restrictive diets mean limiting fat and calories and eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These diets may hold promise in cancer prevention and treatment. But they can be dangerous if they lead to too much weight loss. Any change in diet should be done under the care of your healthcare team. Some science studies show that some nutritional supplements may help treat and prevent cancer. But some supplements may lead to cancer or make cancer worse. This is a complex area of research.

4. Physical therapies

These are meant to relax, align, energize, and strengthen the body. Some of these may help improve strength, balance, and pain management. They include:

- Exercise
- Progressive deep relaxation
- Massage
- Chiropractic care
- Osteopathy
- Mind-body disciplines, such as yoga, qi gong, or tai chi
- Hands-on energy therapy, such as reiki

5. Traditional medicines from around the world

Traditional medicines have been used for thousands of years. They may offer treatments for cancer. Some types include:

- Traditional Chinese Medicine

- Acupuncture
- Ayurvedic medicine from India
- Traditional Tibetan medicine
- Medicine of indigenous people in the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia

6. Herbal treatments

Some herbal treatments are new. Others come from traditional medicines. Herbal therapies are being studied. Some herbs may help with cancer treatment. Others may be harmful. Variation in the purity of herbal treatments sold in the U.S. is a big problem. This is because the market is not well controlled. Some herbal products don't contain what their label says. Others have powerful standard medicines or toxic substances.

7. Unconventional medicines or supplements

These types of cancer therapies are not well controlled in the U.S. They don't have good data on how effective, safe, and pure they are. Some use secret formulas that claim to cure cancer. Providers claim the secrecy is needed to prevent others from stopping or controlling their treatments. Some unconventional medicines or supplements may be able to work. But they need more testing in science studies. It can be dangerous to use these therapies instead of standard medicine to treat cancer.

8. Electromagnetic therapies

These types of therapies include:

- The use of magnets
- Part of Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Complex electromagnetic devices

These are not widely used by people with cancer in the U.S. But they are being studied for use.

9. Unconventional use of standard cancer therapies

These begin with changes in medical practice. Standard treatments are used in ways that are different from their approved use. This is then considered unconventional. One example is chronotherapy. This is when surgery or chemotherapy is timed to occur at the same time as cyclical changes (circadian rhythm) in the body of a person with cancer. It's thought that this timing may lead to fewer side effects and better treatment response. More research is needed.

10. Esoteric therapies

The National Association of Esoteric Healing says this is the science of healing through the energy field using spiritual healing principles. It is thought to benefit physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health.

Before trying any treatment

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health says that you should talk with your healthcare team before starting complementary treatments for cancer. This will help keep your cancer care coordinated and safe.

Keep in mind that some complementary treatments can interfere with standard cancer treatments. This includes nutritional therapy and herbs. And to use some of these approaches safely, you need a trained and experienced provider. Tell your healthcare providers about all complementary therapies you use or are thinking of using. This will help make sure that your cancer treatments will be safe.

Talk with a healthcare provider before deciding to use an alternative therapy. This means a therapy used instead of standard treatment. Learn about standard treatments and the results you might expect before using an alternative therapy instead. Unproven products and practices that delay standard treatment may be dangerous. This may give cancer time to grow and spread.

You can learn more from these groups:

[National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](#)

[American Cancer Society](#)

[National Cancer Institute](#)

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