

Integrative Medicine & Complementary and Alternative Therapies as Part of Blood Cancer Care

No. 8 in a series providing the latest information on blood cancers

Highlights

- Many people are using integrative medicine (IM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies to help manage symptoms, reduce side effects and to have a sense of control over their health.
- IM addresses a patient's body, mind and spirit and encourages patients to be partners in their treatment.
- IM supports the use of some CAM therapies (those that have been found to be safe and effective) in addition to conventional cancer therapies such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and immunotherapy in order to enhance the quality of cancer care.
- CAM therapies include support groups, therapeutic massage, acupuncture, meditation, yoga, art therapy and music therapy, among others.
- It is important to talk openly with your healthcare provider about any CAM therapies you are currently using or considering using. This will allow your healthcare team to devise a comprehensive, coordinated treatment plan that incorporates CAM therapies that are safe and effective.
 - Many CAM therapies have not been studied. Some may be neither safe nor effective.
 - Some CAM therapies have been shown to be effective for symptom relief (for example, to help alleviate nausea, vomiting and fatigue). To date, there is no scientific evidence that any CAM therapies will slow cancer progression.
- Studies are ongoing to evaluate CAM therapies and to determine those that are safe and effective for people living with blood cancers and other diseases.
- Making an informed decision that is right for you is important. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society can help direct you to additional resources about CAM as well as more information about blood cancers.

Introduction

Many people are using complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies to reduce stress, prevent or minimize side effects and symptoms, and support health and healing. CAM includes an array of healing philosophies, approaches and therapies that embrace a holistic approach to care – treating the mind, body and spirit. Examples of CAM therapies are support groups, therapeutic massage, acupuncture, meditation, yoga, art therapy and music therapy.

The emergence of integrative medicine (IM) has prompted greater awareness of the use of CAM as part of cancer care. When a CAM therapy is used in addition to chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy or surgery, it is referred to as a “complementary” therapy. When a therapy is used alone or instead of the proven standard of care it is referred to as an “alternative” therapy.

Some CAM therapies have been studied and have demonstrated safety and benefits for cancer patients. For example, there are certain complementary therapies that help patients manage cancer treatment-related side effects, such as nausea, fatigue and pain. However, there is little or no scientific evidence about the safety or effectiveness of other CAM therapies. For this reason, it is important to learn as much as you can about any CAM therapies you are using, or thinking about using, and to consult your healthcare provider for medical advice and information.

Making informed decisions that are right for you is important for all aspects of your cancer treatment. The following information provides an overview of how CAM therapies are being incorporated into comprehensive treatment plans, major categories of CAM therapies, tips for talking with your healthcare team and additional resources.

Integrative Cancer Care

The use of IM has grown partly in response to efforts by patients to take a more active role in their health care and use therapies that focus on overall health and healing. IM combines CAM therapies, such as acupuncture, massage or meditation, with standard treatments (also called mainstream, conventional, Western, allopathic or proven treatments). Conventional cancer treatment includes the use of chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery – alone or in combination. By integrating CAM therapies into conventional treatment plans, healthcare providers are better able to address the physical, emotional, spiritual and quality-of-life needs of their patients. There must be some scientific evidence that a CAM therapy is safe and effective before it can be recommended and used as part of a treatment plan.

In 1998, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) expanded its efforts to evaluate CAM by founding the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM). NIH has invested in research to study how CAM therapies work, whether they are effective and which patients might benefit from the use of specific therapies (e.g., people living with cancer, HIV/AIDS, heart disease,

Basic Principles of Integrative Medicine

- Reaffirms importance of the relationship between health providers and patients
- Encourages patient-centered care, empowering patients as partners in their treatment
- Focuses on the whole person – the body, mind and spirit
- Uses evidence-based therapies (conventional and CAM) to support and achieve optimal health and healing

Source: Consortium of Academic Health Center for Integrative Medicine

diabetes or other chronic illnesses). NCCAM and the National Cancer Institute Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Therapy are charged with supporting and holding CAM therapies to the same rigorous scientific investigation used to evaluate standard cancer treatments.

The Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine (CAHCIM) was created in 2002 to advocate a science-based, integrative model of health care. CAHCIM's membership includes more than 30 multidisciplinary IM centers at major academic medical institutions across the country. The potential benefits and risks of CAM are also being taught in many medical schools.

A growing number of hospitals, cancer centers and individual healthcare providers offer CAM therapies and will include them in patients' treatment plans. A number of major cancer centers have established IM services to make evidence-based CAM therapies, such as music therapy, therapeutic massage, acupuncture, meditation and yoga, easily accessible to patients and families. As a result, some cancer patients taking advantage of these therapies can receive their CAM treatment and their primary cancer treatment in the same setting. Some patients may have a single treatment plan that incorporates CAM and conventional therapies, but they may not be able to receive all of their treatment in the same location.

An integrative healthcare team evaluates the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of each patient and then recommends and incorporates specific CAM therapies and lifestyle changes as part of a comprehensive treatment plan. Team members consider the scientific evidence, identified risks and benefits, and individual preferences when they advise patients about various CAM therapies.

Understanding the Benefits and Risk of CAM Therapies

A growing number of people are turning to CAM therapies as a way to help manage symptoms, reduce side effects, and restore and promote a sense of control and vitality (see the section, *What Types of Complementary and Alternative Therapies are Available?* for a description of different

groups of CAM therapies). Roughly two out of three cancer patients have tried at least one CAM therapy as part of their cancer care. Existing scientific evidence acknowledges certain CAM therapies as useful tools that may alleviate cancer-related symptoms and treatment side effects (e.g., nausea and fatigue). For example, acupuncture has been evaluated in a number of studies and is now recognized as a safe method for managing chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting and it is effective for some patients. Acupuncture stimulates the nerve centers through the use of thin needles inserted near the surface of the skin.

When used in addition to other standard cancer treatments, certain CAM therapies can play an important role in enhancing the quality of a person's overall care and peace of mind. Some studies have shown that using CAM therapies can help patients to better manage disease and treatment side effects. CAM users often say they feel less limited or defined by their cancer when using CAM in addition to conventional treatments. Many of these therapies are gentle, relaxing and minimally invasive and provide ways for patients to develop an appreciation of themselves and an awareness of their inner strength. Some techniques are "passive," requiring limited participation (for example, massage and Reiki), while others are "active" (yoga, tai chi, support groups).

CAM therapies can help

- Manage symptoms
- Reduce treatment side effects (e.g., fatigue, depression, nausea)
- Enhance feelings of well-being and quality of life.

Clinical trials are ongoing. They are investigating the potential for CAM therapies to help

- Improve the effects of treatment
- Boost the immune system
- Reduce the risk of developing cancer, or reduce the chance that cancer will recur (come back); this use is sometimes referred to as "chemoprevention."

Still, there are relatively few studies about the safety and effectiveness of most CAM therapies. To date, there is no scientific evidence that any CAM therapies can slow cancer progression. The decision to use any unproven therapy outside of a clinical trial as a replacement for recommended chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy or surgery can be dangerous, delaying necessary and life-saving treatment. It is important to remember, there are no "magic bullets" or "cures."

CAM Therapies 1-2-3

Knowledge about CAM therapies is evolving, so it is important to stay in communication with your healthcare providers about the latest information concerning specific CAM therapies you are either currently using or thinking about using. You should also be sure to tell them about other drugs and/or vitamins, herbs or supplements you are taking. See the section, *Talking to Your Healthcare Provider*.

To date, most of the research related to CAM therapies has focused on symptom relief. Below is some information about 1) helpful CAM therapies, 2) therapies under investigation and 3) therapies that may be harmful.

1. The following is a partial list of complementary methods that have been found to be helpful in relieving disease symptoms or the side effects of cancer treatment:

- **Therapeutic massage** may be beneficial for reducing cancer-related fatigue, anxiety and nausea.
- **Acupuncture** can reduce chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting; additional evidence for this biologic effect was reported in a recent article that pooled the results of 11 trials (Cochrane, 2006); other studies show acupuncture can alleviate pain from surgery; still others are looking into whether acupuncture can combat treatment-related fatigue.
- **Mind-body therapies** (e.g., support groups, relaxation training, guided imagery, meditation) can relieve emotional distress; there is some evidence certain modalities can reduce cancer-related pain and are being investigated further.
- **Aromatherapy** can help alter and enhance mood.

2. A growing number of studies are investigating specific CAM therapies within designated groups of patients, such as patients with blood cancers. Here is a sampling of studies currently underway:

- Researchers are evaluating *mindfulness meditation* in patients undergoing bone marrow transplantation to determine whether this technique helps them cope better with the procedure (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute). This form of meditation involves learning to be present in the moment by paying attention to your breathing, sights, and sounds, as well as sensations, thoughts or feelings you may be experiencing.
- The National Cancer Institute recently launched a pilot study to determine the feasibility of a larger clinical investigation of *healing touch* for supportive care in patients receiving chemotherapy for acute myelogenous leukemia or acute lymphocytic leukemia.
- Researchers are also investigating whether a *green tea* extract can kill stubborn leukemia cells in patients with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. Previous studies have examined the potential protective effect of green tea to prevent cancer (chemoprevention).
- Two small studies involving pediatric oncology patients (Liossi and Hatria, 1999 and 2003) found *hypnosis* lessened procedural pain and pain-related anxiety and yielded better results compared to coping skills or relaxation/distraction. Studies are ongoing.
- Curcumin, the active ingredient in tumeric, is being studied for possible anticancer or anti-inflammatory effects (M. D. Anderson Cancer Center).

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CAM Therapies 1-2-3 (continued)

3. Some CAM therapies have been found to be ineffective or harmful to patients undergoing cancer treatments. This list is not all inclusive. For more information, please speak with your healthcare provider.

- While St. John's wort is effective as an antidepressant, it can interfere with chemotherapeutic agents.
- Other herbs and vitamins (e.g., feverfew, vitamin E, ginkgo, garlic) can disrupt blood clotting and often need to be discontinued before surgery.
- Concerns have also been raised about dietary antioxidants, which may interact with radiation or chemotherapy.
- Taking vitamins as dietary supplements may be helpful to promote health in some persons with cancer. However, large doses of these same vitamins can be harmful. Studies show that mega doses of vitamins do not counter any benefit in comfort or survival, and may cause diarrhea, renal stones, iron overload and gastrointestinal discomfort. For example, overdoses of vitamin A (25,000 IU or more daily), may cause severe liver disease and high doses of vitamin B6 (more than 100 mg daily), may cause balance difficulties or nerve injury.
- The use of laetrile has not been found to be an effective anticancer therapy and can result in cyanide poisoning.
- Shark cartilage is another substance that has been touted as a way to boost the immune system to fight cancer; however, no scientific evidence has proven cartilage to be an effective treatment for cancer. Studies are ongoing.

Talk openly with you cancer team about any CAM therapies you are either considering or currently using. In general, any treatments that are presented as alternatives to standard cancer therapies should be considered only within the context of clinical trials (See *Exploring Clinical Trials* section).

What Types of Complementary and Alternative Therapies are Available?

At this time, CAM “cancer therapies” are not targeted to people with specific types of blood cancer. However, there are a vast number of CAM therapies and some of the more commonly used ones are briefly discussed here. NCCAM groups CAM therapies into five major categories.

1. Alternative medical systems

These systems include Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, homeopathic and naturopathic medicine. Chinese medicine emphasizes the balance of qi (“chee”) or vital energy. Within this system, illness is defined as a disturbance in the balance of vital energy. Ayurveda is a system of healing which evolved from teachings in ancient India. It stresses the use of body, mind and spirit in disease prevention and treatment and strives to achieve harmony within the individual. Homeopathic

medicine and naturopathic medicine are alternative health systems that have been part of Western culture for the last few centuries. Examples of techniques used in alternative medical systems include acupuncture, herbal medicine, restorative physical exercises and controlled breathing.

2. Mind-body interventions

Mind-body interventions use strategies to enhance the mind's impact on the body's function and physical symptoms. Interventions aim to help patients relax, reduce stress and relieve symptoms associated with cancer and cancer treatments. Examples include meditation, support groups, hypnosis, yoga, tai chi, music and art therapy and prayer.

3. Biologically based treatments

These therapies involve substances found in nature, such as herbs, foods, vitamins and other dietary supplements. While approval is required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for drugs to be prescribed for a particular condition or illness, complementary and alternative therapies such as vitamins or herbal medicines are not considered drugs, but foods. Unlike drugs, they do not have to be tested by the FDA before they are available to consumers, so their effectiveness and safety is often unknown. Few herbal products have been tested for side effects or quality. However, the FDA can remove a product from the market if the product is deemed harmful. Remember, just because a product is "natural" does not mean it is safe.

4. Manipulative and body-based therapies

These methods are based on the manipulation and/or movement of one or more parts of the body, such as chiropractic techniques, osteopathic manipulation, reflexology and therapeutic massage. The focus is primarily on the relationship between body's structure (primarily that of the spine) and function and how this relationship affects health.

5. Energy therapies

These therapies focus either on energy originating within the body (biofields) or from outside sources (electromagnetic fields). Therapies such as acupuncture, Reiki or therapeutic or healing touch work with the body's energy levels.

For more detailed information on specific CAM therapies and related research, please refer to the organizations listed in the *Resources* section of this fact sheet, speak with your healthcare provider or contact the Society's Information Resource Center.

Exploring Clinical Trials

If you think using a complementary or alternative therapy would be beneficial, you may have the opportunity to take part in a clinical trial. Cancer clinical trials are scientific studies that are designed to find safer, more effective treatments, screenings methods for diagnosis and possible means of prevention for specific cancers. Conventional cancer treatments like chemotherapy, immunotherapy and radiation therapy have undergone years of rigorous study. Clinical trials to study various CAM therapies are underway in many locations across the country to assess their safety, benefits, dosing and relative effectiveness. Patients enrolled in CAM studies receive the best standard cancer treatment either with or without the CAM therapy in question. If you would like to know more about CAM clinical trials, speak with your cancer team. You can also contact the Society for more information. Please refer to the *Resources* section for additional information about clinical trials and contact information for the Society's IRC.

Will My Insurance Pay for Complementary and Alternative Therapies?

Some health insurance companies have started covering certain types of CAM treatment, such as acupuncture or chiropractic care. Check with your insurance provider to find out about your health plan coverage.

Talking to Your Healthcare Provider

Make sure to speak openly with your healthcare provider(s) about any complementary or alternative therapies you are currently using or considering. This is important because

- Many CAM therapies have not yet been extensively studied. For this reason, it is not widely known which are potentially helpful or harmful (see *CAM Therapies 1-2-3*).
- Some therapies – herbal remedies and dietary supplements in particular – can interact with radiation therapy or chemotherapy. Observation and follow-up by your cancer team may be necessary to identify any adverse effects.
- If you have been looking for information about specific CAM therapies, your health care providers can also help you to better understand scientific studies about specific CAM therapies that you may have taken the time to research. Together, you can determine which therapies will be the most effective and safe for you.

Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Team

Use the following questions as a guide to discuss CAM with your healthcare team:

- Are there complementary and alternative therapies you would recommend?
- Have these methods been studied?
- What benefits can I expect from this therapy?
- How will I know if the therapy is working or not?
- Is there a risk this will interfere with standard cancer treatments?
- Are there potential side effects? What should I look out for?
- Do you offer these as part of your practice? If not, can you refer me to a licensed practitioner in the area?
- Specifically, are there methods you can suggest to reduce the nausea and fatigue related to my cancer treatments?
- Are there specific CAM therapies you would advise against?
- Do you know if this therapy is part of a clinical trial? Should I consider participating?

Locating an IM Specialist or a CAM Practitioner

Your oncologist or cancer center may be able to refer you to CAM services. Practitioners might include IM specialists (for example, those who have completed a residency and/or fellowship in IM or board certified members of the American Board of Holistic Medicine), acupuncturists, chiropractors, naturopaths, massage therapists and cognitive psychologists.

There are other ways to locate an IM specialist or CAM practitioner if your oncologist is unable to refer you. Here are a few suggestions:

- Check with your health insurance provider to see and ask for the names of practitioners who accept your insurance.
- Find out whether your primary healthcare provider(s) can recommend an IM specialist or make a CAM referral.
- Contact the American Holistic Medical Association or American Board of Holistic Medicine (see the *Resources* section).

- Ask a friend or someone who has a similar diagnosis to yours and is knowledgeable about CAM to recommend a practitioner for the type of therapy you are seeking.
- Research the professional organization representing the type of practitioner you are seeking. For example, the American Chiropractic Association (www.acatoday.com) provides reputable information about chiropractic care and tools to find a chiropractor in your area.
- Your local health department can help find a contact at your state licensing board, which frequently oversees acupuncturists, chiropractors, nutritionists and licensed massage therapists, for example.

Be sure to find out whether the practitioners you are considering consulting 1) are licensed or certified and 2) have worked with cancer patients before and, therefore, have an understanding of conventional cancer treatments. Before scheduling any appointments, ask how many years they have been in practice, where they received their training, as well as the estimated cost of treatment. The goal is to find someone who will work with your oncologist and other healthcare providers so that together they can devise a treatment plan that meets your needs.

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society is Always Here to Assist You

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society is a national voluntary health agency with 64 chapters in the United States and two chapters in Canada. The Society offers accurate, up-to-date information on blood cancers and coping strategies to members of the public and cancer treatment professionals. Support programs, patient financial aid and education programs are offered through the Society's local chapters. To find the Society chapter nearest you, visit our online chapter finder or contact:

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
1311 Mamaroneck Avenue
White Plains, NY 10605
USA
(800) 955-4572
www.LLS.org

Information Specialists at the IRC can answer general questions about diagnosis and treatment options, offer guidance and support, and assist with clinical trials information. Cancer clinical trials, sometimes called “research studies”, are conducted by physicians to improve the care and treatment of cancer patients. Clinical trials can be an important treatment option for patients with leukemia, lymphoma or myeloma. They offer patients access to new therapies being tested to see if these therapies can increase survival and/or improve quality of life. The IRC offers clinical trials information, including guidance on how patients can work with their physicians to find out if a specific study is an appropriate treatment option. Information specialists will conduct individual clinical trial searches for patients, families and healthcare providers. This service is also available on our Web site at www.LLS.org.

Resources

For more information about CAM, contact any of the following:

American Holistic Health Association (AHA)

(714) 779-6152

www.ahha.org

The AHA focuses on assisting the public with information and education.

American Board of Holistic Medicine (ABHM)

(509) 886-3046

www.holisticboard.org

The goal of the ABHM is to establish standards of care in the application of the body of knowledge encompassed by Holistic Medicine, so that these concepts can be fully integrated into medical practice, education, health planning and research.

American Holistic Medical Association (AHMA)

(505) 292-7788

www.holisticmedicine.org

The mission of the AHMA is to support practitioners in their evolving personal and professional development as healers and to educate physicians about holistic medicine. The AHMA prints an annual directory of members (holistic physicians and other healthcare providers) and provides an online guide to choosing a holistic practitioner.

Resources (continued)

American Institute for Cancer Research Nutrition Hotline Online

(800) 843-8114

www.aicr.org

This online service highlights information on different nutritional regimens and potential health benefits.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

(888) 463-6332

www.fda.gov

Provides a number of articles on dietary supplements, discussions of specific products with potentially serious side effects and warnings about specific products.

CAM on PubMed

www.pubmed.com

A free, easy-to-use search tool to find citations/abstracts for peer-reviewed CAM studies; click on “Limits” tab and select “Complementary Medicine” as a subset.

National Cancer Institute, Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Therapy

(800) 4-CANCER

www.cancer.gov/cam

Information on clinical trials, research and fact sheets on using and evaluating complementary and alternative therapies are available on this web site.

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health

(888) 644-6226

www.nccam.nih.gov

Fact sheets on specific complementary and alternative therapies and ongoing studies can be found on this web site; its clearinghouse provides information and publications on various topics, including how to discuss the topic with your doctor and how to find a practitioner in your area. To find clinical trials information, visit www.nccam.nih.gov/clinicaltrials. You can search by the type of therapy or your blood cancer.

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