



## **Integrative Medicine & Cancer Care**

**What is integrative medicine?** Integrative medicine combines natural treatments such as yoga and nutrition with conventional treatments such as chemotherapy and surgery to provide a personalized and holistic care plan. Integrative therapies can be classified into four common themes including: nutritional health, dietary supplements, complementary and alternative practices, and mind-body techniques. Together with conventional medicine, patients can explore additional options to help manage symptoms related to their cancer diagnosis.

**The ways integrative medicine may be helpful in your cancer care.** The majority of integrative methods focus on the management of side effects and symptoms of the treatments, in addition to the cancer. For instance, nutritional modifications may help patients improve chemotherapy related symptoms including nausea and fatigue. Mind and body exercises such as meditation and yoga have shown to improve anxiety and other mood changes. Alternative practices such as acupuncture may help with certain pain-related symptoms, and certain herbal supplements may aid in some gastrointestinal disturbances [2, 3, 4].

**Are there special doctors that use integrative medicine?** Some oncologists and cancer care team members are specially trained to treat cancer patients using both conventional and complementary medicine approaches. The American Board of Physician Specialties recognizes integrative medicine as an official specialty. Physicians (MD, DO), advanced practice providers (NP, PA, CNM, CNS, CRNS) and pharmacists (PharmD) can only become board certified in integrative medicine after specialized training and passing a board certification exam [1]. This additional training allows both the doctor/provider and the patient to explore the use of alternative therapies to help treat symptoms related, but not limited to chemotherapy and surgery in a safe and monitored manner. Patients that have been treated by an integrative specialist are typically highly satisfied, reporting that they felt their physician cared about their well-being as much as they did and that they were treated with respect [5].

**Are integrative methods based on scientific evidence?** Many types of integrative methods are supported by scientific evidence. For instance, there is significant scientific data that suggests meditation and mindfulness may alleviate some symptoms related to mood changes, insomnia, and anxiety [3, 4]. However, many methods are not backed by evidence. Healthcare providers certified in integrative medicine should be able to objectively

evaluate any evidence for a given therapy to determine its validity and efficacy.

**Things to consider before incorporating natural treatments into your cancer care plan.** Unfortunately, there are many people and companies that try to take advantage of people undergoing cancer treatment. Patients should be cautious of anything or anyone that makes major claims, specifically claims that a product is a “cure” or replaces the need for chemotherapy, surgery, or conventional methods. We always recommend that you consult your oncologist before adding any type of complementary therapy into your cancer treatment.

#### References

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