Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment

This information explains how integrative medicine therapies can help reduce the symptoms and side effects of cancer and cancer treatment.

About MSK's Integrative Medicine Service

MSK's Integrative Medicine Service offers therapies to patients, their families and caregivers, MSK staff, and members of the community. Integrative medicine therapies, also called complementary therapies, are therapies and treatments that go along with your cancer care. They can help you control symptoms and side effects of cancer and cancer treatment. They can also help you gain strength during your treatment and recovery.

The integrative medicine therapies offered at MSK are explained in the next section. For more information, visit www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine or call the Integrative Medicine Service at 646-449-1010.

You can also schedule an appointment to meet with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine Service by calling 646-608-8550. They will help you make a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects of your cancer treatment. They can also answer any questions you may have about herbs and supplements. This appointment is covered by insurance. Visit www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/expertise for more information.

Types of Integrative Medicine Therapies

The following integrative medicine therapies are offered through the Integrative Medicine Service. You can also learn how to do some of them on your own. If you would like to make an appointment for any of these therapies, call 646-449-1010.

- Acupuncture.
- Acupressure.
- Yoga.
- Tai chi.
- Massage therapy.
- Dance and movement therapy.
- Meditation and other mind-body relaxation therapies.

- Music therapy.
- Exercise.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a form of treatment from traditional Chinese medicine. It’s performed by a licensed acupuncturist (a person with special training in acupuncture). During your treatment, you will lie on a padded table while your acupuncturist places thin needles into your skin. The placement of the needles depends on the problem being treated. Most people feel little or no pain. Once the needles are in place, you will rest for about 30 minutes. Your acupuncturist will remove the needles at the end of your session and throw them away.

Research studies show that acupuncture can reduce some side effects of cancer and cancer treatment, including:

- Nausea (feeling like you’re going to throw up).
- Pain.
- Hot flashes.
- Dry mouth.
- Digestive problems (problems breaking down food).
- Anxiety (strong feelings of worry or fear).

- Insomnia (trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early).

Acupuncture treatments are offered at MSK. Outpatients (patients not staying in the hospital) and members of the community can get acupuncture in private sessions or small group sessions. Some insurance plans may cover acupuncture treatments under certain conditions. Call your insurance provider for more information. To schedule an acupuncture appointment, call 646-449-1010.

Acupressure

Acupressure is based on acupuncture. With acupressure, your healthcare provider puts pressure on specific places on your body. These places are called acupoints. Pressing these points can help your muscles relax and improve how your blood circulates.

You can learn how to perform acupressure on yourself to manage problems like nausea, anxiety, and headaches. Ask your healthcare provider for more information or read:

- *Acupressure for Nausea and Vomiting* (www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_nausea_vomiting)
- *Acupressure for Pain and Headaches*

(www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_pain_headaches)

- *Acupressure for Stress and Anxiety* (www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_anxiety)

Yoga and tai chi (Taiji Quan)

Yoga and tai chi are practices that combine gentle body movements with meditation. They can help strengthen both your body and mind.

Practicing them regularly can help:

- Decrease the risk of falls.
- Improve balance.
- Build confidence.
- Decrease anxiety.
- Decrease fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual).
- Improve sleep.
- Improve strength and flexibility.

The Integrative Medicine Service offers individual and group yoga and tai chi classes for patients, caregivers, family members, and the community. Call 646-449-1010 to learn more about these classes.

Visit www.mskcc.org/taichi to do Tai Chi at home.

Massage therapy

Getting a massage can help you feel calm and relaxed. It can also reduce tension and muscle aches, loosen up tight tissues, and relieve anxiety and stress. Learn more about how massages can benefit you by watching the video Learn How Massage Therapy Works. Visit www.mskcc.org/videos/learn-how-massage-therapy-works to watch it.

You can ask a friend or family member to gently massage your neck, shoulders, hands, and feet. Ask them to start with a light touch. They should avoid touching any:

- Broken skin.
- Areas above your tumor site.
- Catheters, ports, or pumps under your skin.
- Stomas on your body.

The Integrative Medicine Service's video *Touch Therapy for Caregivers* can help teach your caregiver how to give a gentle massage. Visit www.mskcc.org/videos/touch-therapy-caregivers to watch it.

You can make an appointment for a massage with one of our massage therapists by calling 646-449-1010.

Meditation

Meditation is the practice of relaxing and clearing your mind. Meditation can help reduce:

- Stress.
- Anxiety.
- Fear.
- Depression (strong feelings of sadness and hopelessness).
- Sleep problems.
- Fatigue.
- Pain.
- Cognitive changes (changes in the way you think and focus).
    - Cognitive changes include having trouble paying attention, concentrating, and thinking quickly. These changes are sometimes called “chemo brain” because healthcare providers used to think they were only related to chemotherapy. Now, we know other treatments can also cause them.

There are many different types of meditation. Mindfulness meditation is when you sit quietly as you pay attention to your thoughts and feelings without judging them.

Practicing meditation

You can learn to practice meditation. This exercise will help you stay present in the moment and relax.

1. Start by closing your eyes and imagining yourself in a peaceful place. Breathe deeply and slowly.
2. Focus on your breathing. Feel the air going in and out of your nose and lungs.
3. Notice how your body feels. Start from the top of your head and move down slowly to the tip of your toes.
4. Relax each part of your body, one part at a time.

Visit www.mskcc.org/meditation to listen to free guided meditations.

Learn more about practicing mindfulness meditation with workshops and classes through the Integrative Medicine Service. For more information, visit www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine or call 646-449-1010.

Dance and movement therapy

Dance and movement therapy is a way to get in touch with your feelings through dance, movement, music, play, relaxation, meditation, and imagery. This can help you:

- Manage pain and other symptoms.
- Release tension.
- Support your recovery.
- Improve your self-esteem and body image.
- Gain energy.

Dance and movement therapy is open to all patients, including adults, young adults, children, and families. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral. For more information, call 646-449-1010.

Music therapy

In music therapy, music is used to help with your physical, emotional, cognitive (thinking), and social needs. It can help reduce symptoms like stress, anxiety, and pain after surgery.

At the Integrative Medicine Service, you can listen to or play music while trained therapists guide you. You can also listen to music in a quiet place with a recording that brings you peace and joy.

You can listen to recordings by our music therapists online, at www.mskcc.org/meditation

Exercise

Exercise can help prevent and treat side effects of treatment, such as fatigue and weakness. It can also help with your recovery.

You can exercise from home by watching Integrative Medicine's video series at www.mskcc.org/exercise_with_msk. Videos include aerobics, strength training, core work, and gentle stretches.

Integrative Medicine at Home

Integrative Medicine at Home is a monthly online membership program of healthy lifestyle classes for MSK patients and their families. The program offers members live online group classes each week, serving all ages and abilities. For more information, call 646-449-1010 or visit www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/membership

Herbs and Dietary Supplements

Some people take herbs and dietary supplements in addition to medications. Here are important guidelines that you must follow when taking supplements.

- **Stop taking all herbs and supplements 1 week**

before having a procedure or surgery, or as directed by your doctor. Some herbs may interfere with anesthesia (medication to make you sleep during surgery) or with blood clotting.

  - For more information, read *Common Medications Containing Aspirin, Other Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), or Vitamin E* (www.mskcc.org/pe/common_meds).

- Ask your healthcare provider or a doctor in the Integrative Medicine Service if you can keep taking an herb or supplement during your treatment. Some herbs or supplements may affect your treatment.
  - For more information, read *Herbal Remedies and Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/herbal_remedies).
- Do not give herbs or supplements to children without asking their doctor first.
- Do not take herbs or supplements if you're pregnant or breastfeeding unless your doctor tells you it's safe.
- Herbs and dietary supplements can have their own side effects.

While you may get tips from your friends, family, and the internet about taking herbs and supplements, they may be wrong or wrong for you. Talk with your healthcare

provider before taking any herbs or supplements.

Visit www.aboutherbs.com for more information about herbs and supplements.

Contact Information

- To schedule a consultation with a doctor in Integrative Medicine, call 646-608-8550.
- To make an appointment for Integrative Medicine Service's therapies, classes, and workshops, call 646-449-1010.

You can also visit our website at www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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