



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment

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

The Integrative Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) offers therapies to patients, their families and caregivers, MSK staff, and members of the community. These are called integrative medicine therapies or complementary therapies. These therapies can be used to help control many 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 available at MSK are explained in the next section. You can call the Integrative Medicine Service at 646-888-0800 to learn more about these therapies.

You can also schedule an appointment to meet with an integrative medicine doctor by calling 646-888-0845. They will help you make a personal care plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects of your cancer treatment. They can answer any questions you may have about herbs and over-the-counter supplements. This appointment is covered by insurance.

Types of Integrative Medicine Therapies

All of the following integrative medicine therapies are available 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 646-888-0800.

- 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 who inserts thin needles into your skin at specific points in your body. Research has shown that acupuncture can reduce some side effects of cancer and cancer treatment, such as nausea, pain, hot flashes, dry mouth, and digestive problems.

Acupuncture treatments are available at MSK. Inpatients can receive acupuncture at no cost. Outpatients and members of the community can receive 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 646-888-0800.

Acupressure

Acupressure is based on acupuncture. With acupressure, pressure is applied to 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 for a variety of problems, including nausea, anxiety, and headache. Ask your doctor or nurse for the following resources or search for them on www.mskcc.org/pe

- *Acupressure for Nausea and Vomiting* (www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_nausea_vomiting)
- *Acupressure for Pain and Headaches* (www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/acupressure-pain-and-headaches)

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

Yoga and tai chi (Taiji Quan)

Yoga and tai chi are practices that combine gentle body movement 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 and fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual), and improve sleep. The Integrative Medicine Service offers individual and group yoga and tai chi classes for patients, family members, and the community. You can call 646-888-0800 to learn more about these classes.

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. You can learn more about how massage benefits you by watching the video [Learn How Massage Therapy Works](#).

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.

You can make an appointment for a massage with one of our massage therapists by calling 646-888-0800.

Meditation

Meditation is the practice of looking inside yourself to develop a relaxed and clear mind. Meditation can help reduce:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Depression
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue

There are many different types of meditation. One of them is mindfulness meditation where 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, starting from the top of your head and moving down slowly to the tip of your toes.
4. Relax each part of your body, one part at a time.

You can also learn how to practice mindfulness meditation with the Integrative Medicine Service in classes such as:

- Meditation 101 (in person). For a schedule of classes, visit www.mskcc.org/event/meditation-101-03
- Meditation 101 (online). For a schedule of classes, visit www.mskcc.org/event/meditation-101-online-01
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). For a schedule of classes, visit www.mskcc.org/event/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction

You can register for a class by calling 646-888-0800.

The Integrative Medicine Service's meditation page has a special collection of free mindfulness practices that you can listen to and enjoy online. Visit www.mskcc.org/meditation

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, and children, and their families. Ask your nurse or doctor for a referral. For more information, call Integrative Medicine Service at 646-888-0800.

Music therapy

In music therapy, music is used to help with your physical, emotional, cognitive, 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 perform 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. We offer music therapy for inpatients. If you're an inpatient, you can ask your doctor or nurse for a referral.

Exercise

Exercise can help prevent and treat side effects of treatment, such as fatigue and weakness. It can also help with your recovery. The Integrative Medicine Service offers a variety of classes and one-on-one trainings specially designed for people with cancer. Call 646-888-0800 to find out which program is right for you.

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.
- Ask your doctor or a doctor in the Integrative Medicine Service about whether you can continue taking an herb or supplement during your treatment. Some herbs or supplements may interfere with these treatments. For more information, read *Common Medications Containing Aspirin and Other Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)* (www.mskcc.org/pe/common_meds).
- Don't give herbs or supplements to children without asking their doctor first.
- Don't take herbs or supplements if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, unless your doctor tells you that it's safe.
- Herbs and dietary supplements can have their own side effects.

While you may receive tips from your friends, family, and the Internet about taking herbs and supplements, they may be wrong or may not apply to your situation. Talk with your doctor before taking any herbs or supplements.

For more information about herbs and supplements, visit www.aboutherb.com or call 646-888-0845 to make an appointment with the Integrative Medicine Service.

Contact Information

- To learn about other integrative medicine therapies available at MSK or to make an appointment with the Integrative Medicine Service, see the contact information below:
 - For outpatient appointments, call 646-888-0800.
 - For inpatient appointments, call 646-888-0888.

- To schedule a consultation with a doctor in Integrative Medicine, call 646-888-0845.
- 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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