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 and Wellness Service

MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness 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 and Wellness Service at 646-449-1010.

You can also schedule an appointment to meet with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine and Wellness 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 to learn more.

Types of integrative medicine therapies

The following integrative medicine therapies are offered through the Integrative Medicine and Wellness 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 and Qigong
- 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 East Asian 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, Tai Chi (Taiji Quan), and Qigong

Yoga, Tai Chi, and Qigong 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 and Wellness Service offers individual and group yoga, Tai Chi, and Qigong 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. Reducing tension and muscle aches while loosening up tight tissues can lower anxiety and stress. Massages can also help with lymphedema or trouble moving from

surgery or radiation. 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 and Wellness 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 in the present 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 and Wellness 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, personalized music-based interventions are used to help with your physical, emotional, cognitive (thinking), and social needs. It can help lower symptoms like stress, anxiety, and pain after surgery.

At the Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service, you can learn about and explore a range of music therapy techniques 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 learn more at https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/mind-body/music-therapy

Listen to recordings by our music therapists online at www.mskcc.org/meditation. You can make an appointment for a virtual or in-person music therapy session with one of our music therapists. Call 646-449-1010 or email musictherapy@mskcc.org.

Exercise

Regular aerobic exercise, such as walking, biking, swimming, or dancing, can help keep your heart and lungs healthy. Strength exercises, such as using resistance bands, lifting weights, or doing body-weight exercises, can help keep your muscles strong.

Research shows that exercise may help:

- Lower cancer-related fatigue and give you more energy.
- Keep or rebuild muscle strength you may have lost during treatment.
- Make daily activities easier.
- Keep your heart and lungs healthy.
- Lower stress and anxiety and improve your mood.
- Help you sleep better.
- Lower pain and discomfort from treatment.
- Improve your balance and lower your risk of falls.
- Help keep your bones strong and keep a healthy weight.
- Help you recover and get back to your usual activities sooner.

Even a small amount of physical activity can help. Your healthcare team can help you make an exercise plan that is safe for you based on your fitness level, symptoms, and

treatment.

If you'd like more support, you can meet with an exercise oncology professional. They can help you create a safe exercise plan based on your diagnosis, treatment, side effects, fitness level, and goals. You can also call 646-449-1010 to learn more.

Integrative Medicine at Home Video Library of Mind-Body and Fitness Classes

Explore online mind-body and fitness classes designed for different fitness levels and abilities. You can view them here: https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/resources/integrative-medicine-video-library-mind-body-fitness-classes

Classes are categorized by fitness level, letting you choose activities that work for you.

Herbs and dietary supplements

Some people take herbs and dietary supplements in addition to medicine. 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

(medicine to make you sleep during surgery) or with blood clotting.

  - To learn more, read *How To Check if a Medicine or Supplement Has Aspirin, Other NSAIDs, Vitamin E, or Fish Oil* (www.mskcc.org/pe/check-med-supplement).

- **Stop taking all herbs and supplements when admitted to the hospital or MSK's Urgent Care Center (UCC).**
  - To learn more, visit https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-managemen...
- Ask your healthcare provider or a doctor in the Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service if you can keep taking an herb or supplement during your treatment. Some herbs or supplements may affect your treatment.
  - To learn more, 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 to learn more about herbs and supplements. You can download the About Herbs app from the App Store or Google Play Store.

Contact information

- To schedule a consultation with a doctor or advanced practice provider in the Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service, call 646-608-8550.
- To make an appointment for Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service's therapies, call 646-449-1010.
- To sign up for an upcoming workshop or series, visit https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/therapies/workshops or 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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