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 the Integrative Medicine Service

The Integrative Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) 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 to 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 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 or visit www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine.

You can also schedule an appointment to meet with a healthcare
provider in the Integrative Medicine Service 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 also answer any questions you may have about herbs and 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 is a person with special training in this field, places thin needles into your skin at specific points in your body. During your treatment, you will lie on a padded table while your acupuncturist sticks thin needles into your skin at specific points on your body. Where the needles are placed depends on the problem that’s being treated. Although needles are used, 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 has shown that acupuncture can reduce some side effects of cancer and cancer treatment, such as nausea (feeling like you’re going to throw up), pain, hot flashes, dry mouth, and digestive problems.

Acupuncture treatments are available at MSK. Inpatients (patients staying in the hospital) can receive acupuncture at no cost. Outpatients (patients not staying in the hospital) 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, 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 help manage problems like nausea, anxiety (strong feelings of worry), and headaches. Ask your healthcare provider for more information or read:

- **Acupressure for Nausea and Vomiting**  
  [www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_nausea_vomiting](www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_nausea_vomiting)
- **Acupressure for Pain and Headaches**  
  [www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_pain_headaches](www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_pain_headaches)
- **Acupressure for Stress and Anxiety**  
  [www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_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 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, caregivers, family members, and the community. Call 646-888-0800 to learn more about these classes.
You can also try to do Tai Chi from home by visiting www.mskcc.org/taichi.

**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*.

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 relaxing and clearing your mind.
Meditation can help reduce:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Depression (strong feelings of sadness and hopelessness)
- 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.
Listen to free guided meditations by visiting www.mskcc.org/meditation.

Learn more about practicing mindfulness meditation with workshops and classes through the Integrative Medicine Service. For more information, visit www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/therapies/workshops or call 646-888-0800.

**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 646-888-0800.

**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. We offer music therapy for inpatients. If you’re an inpatient, you can ask your healthcare provider for a referral.

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. The Integrative Medicine Service offers a variety of classes and one-on-one trainings for people with cancer. Call 646-888-0800 to find out which program is right for you.

You can also exercise from home by watching Integrative Medicine’s video series. Videos include aerobics, strength training, core work, and gentle stretches.

**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 if you can keep 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 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 may be wrong for you. Talk with your doctor before taking any herbs or supplements.

For more information about herbs and supplements, visit
www.aboutherbs.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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