

About Integrative Medicine

A Guide to Self-Care and Support | Fall 2024

CHIEF'S NOTE



Jun J. Mao, MD, MSCE
Chief, Integrative Medicine Service

Welcome to the fall edition of our newsletter. As the warm hues of autumn begin to unfold, I'm excited to bring you the latest updates, insights, and resources in integrative oncology. This season is a time for reflection and renewal, and we're here to support you with comprehensive, evidence-based, holistic care.

In this issue, we discuss how integrative medicine can help support adolescent and young adults with cancer. We also learn about recent findings on the impact of virtual mind-body fitness classes designed to help prepare people diagnosed with thoracic cancer for surgery. Finally, we hear from Integrative Medicine at Home mind-body instructor Robin Hardbattle on how tai chi can support patients during cancer, and we explore the evidence for elderberry in our About Herbs feature.

Thank you for being a part of our community. I hope this newsletter brings you valuable information and a sense of connection as we move into the fall season together.

Be well,
Jun

Meeting the Unique Needs of Adolescent and Young Adult Patients

By Christina Seluzicki, MBE

Across the United States each day, adolescents and young adults are diagnosed with cancer. In the midst of a life stage that is meant to be full of visions for the future and establishing a sense of self, the impact of cancer can produce many physical, mental, and spiritual challenges.

MSK's Lisa and Scott Stuart Center for Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Cancers is a comprehensive clinical and research center dedicated to improving experiences and outcomes for patients ages 15-39. In collaboration with the Center, the Integrative Medicine Service provides a specialized area of support with therapies including yoga, massage, meditation, dance therapy, music therapy, and fitness to help patients maintain and recover physical functioning and process the emotions they may experience before, during, and after treatment.



The Service aspires to help young adults maintain a sense of normalcy during an extraordinary and difficult time in their lives. This includes consultations with Dr. Nirupa Raghunathan, MSK's Director of Pediatric Integrative Oncology, who works with her patients to create a personalized, holistic approach to cancer care and survivorship.



Dr. Raghunathan and her integrative medicine colleagues have also designed virtual yoga classes and community building workshops on topics ranging from exercise for maintaining function through treatment to martial arts for movement to music and breath for anxiety.

Additional workshops on helping parents with cancer to support their young kids and meditation for the holidays are planned for the fall.



“The goal of these programs is to create a safe environment for young adults to connect about their experiences,” says Dr. Raghunathan. “We want to offer content that is driven by what would be most helpful for our patients. If we know what they need to support them in mind, body, and spirit, we will do our best to deliver it.”

Young adults impacted by cancer can meet with Dr. Raghunathan to create their integrative care plan. Call [646-888-0845](tel:646-888-0845) to schedule your first visit.

For more information on available resources, including virtual programs, support groups, and education programs, please contact AYAprogram@mskcc.org.

Benefits of Virtual Mind-Body Fitness Classes After Thoracic Cancer Surgery

By Krupali Desai, MD (Ayurveda), MPH

People who undergo surgery for a thoracic cancer, such as lung or esophageal, may be at increased risk for post-surgical complications, particularly those who have low levels of physical activity. Guidelines from the American Society of Clinical Oncology recommend exercise before surgery for patients undergoing lung cancer surgery. To address this issue, the Integrative Medicine and Thoracic Services at MSK created a virtual prehabilitation – or prehab – program of mind-body fitness classes.

This program was designed to help patients prepare for and recover from thoracic surgery by offering two weekly 45-minute mind-body fitness classes led by a fitness specialist via Zoom. The results are promising. In an initial evaluation of their experiences, participants reported high satisfaction with the classes, feeling stronger, more connected to their peers, and better prepared before surgery and for post-surgical recovery. To explore more deeply, researchers conducted a retrospective cohort study in which patients who took at least one prehab class were compared to those who did not participate in any prehab classes. They found that those who participated had fewer hospital readmissions within 30 days of being discharged.

“Our results are really exciting because they suggest that participation in virtual prehab classes may improve outcomes for our patients undergoing thoracic cancer surgery,” says Dr. Jun J. Mao, chief of MSK’s Integrative Medicine Service. “The classes not only provide a much-needed community for patients during an extremely difficult time in their lives but may improve the body’s ability to heal after surgery.”

Are you interested in joining live, online mind-body and fitness classes each week from the comfort of your home? You can learn more about Integrative Medicine at Home at msk.org/athome.

Integrative Medicine at Home Membership Program



Start your membership online today!
Visit msk.org/athome.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Monthly membership: **\$25**
Three-month membership: **\$60**
Six-month membership: **\$120**
(plus one free workshop)

AS A MEMBER, YOU CAN ENJOY:

- › Connecting with your cancer community
- › Staying active, with guidance from MSK experts
- › Learning new skills to increase resilience and decrease stress
- › Unlimited access to daily fitness and mind-body classes
- › Dedicated website with on-demand videos to help keep you moving on your schedule
- › Discounts on our small group workshops and mind-body series

The Role of Tai Chi in Cancer Care



By Robin Hardbattle, MS, LAc

Robin Hardbattle is a mind-body instructor in MSK's Integrative Medicine Service, where he teaches tai chi classes in the Integrative Medicine at Home membership program.

What is tai chi and how can it support patients through cancer?

[Tai chi](#) is a mind-body martial arts practice for self-defense and cultivation of health and wellness that focuses on teaching the practitioner to move more efficiently. For example, through tai chi, you can learn to improve your spinal alignment, which helps with balance and relaxation. The less muscle tension you hold in your body, the more efficiently you can move, allowing you to conserve energy. This is especially

important if you are going through cancer treatment and struggling with fatigue. Being more stable in your body also helps minimize falls and strengthens the muscles of the legs and core.

What makes tai chi a mind-body practice?

In addition to helping on a purely physical level, a key element of tai chi is in the mind-focused attention. Any practice that requires you to focus your attention is a type of meditation. You can practice tai chi as a purely physical activity to help strengthen your body, but if you also apply this added mental element, it becomes a moving meditation.

How is tai chi related to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)?

Tai chi is based on the principles of TCM, an ancient medical system of Chinese medical practices, such as acupuncture, herbal therapy, massage, and qigong. Qigong is a mind-body practice closely related to tai chi that is primarily focused on cultivating health and wellbeing using TCM principles. If you are interested in learning more about TCM and qigong, I encourage you to join an [upcoming workshop](#) on November 12.

Join Robin for his weekly tai chi classes through Integrative Medicine at Home. To learn more and become a member, visit msk.org/athome.



It takes a village! Our team of integrative medicine experts is dedicated to supporting your mind, body, and spirit through compassionate, patient-centered care based on the latest scientific evidence.



Elderberry

By Jyothirmai Gubili, MS



Elderberry is a shrub grown in many parts of the world. Its flowers and fruit are used to treat cold and flu symptoms, inflamed sinuses (sinusitis), respiratory diseases, and constipation. Elderberry supplements are sold as syrups, gummies, lozenges, capsules, and teas.

In laboratory and animal studies, elderberry killed or stopped microorganisms like bacteria from growing, helped control blood sugar levels, boosted the immune system, and reduced inflammation (swelling). Small clinical studies have shown that it may help

reduce symptoms of influenza. Larger trials are needed to confirm the findings.

Elderberry contains compounds known as cyanogenic glycosides. Therefore, consuming raw or unripe fruits, leaves and stems can cause cyanide toxicity.

For more details about elderberry, see our [full write-up](#) on the About Herbs website or download the About Herbs app (available for Android via [Google Play](#) and iOS via the [App StoreSM](#)).

Upcoming Online Programming

[Register online today](#) to join an upcoming wellness program. Scan the QR code with your phone to sign up online or call 646-449-1010.

Workshops: \$20 members; \$25 non-members

Regular series: \$100 members; \$125 non-members

OCTOBER

- › **Series:** Self-Care and Healing Through Ayurveda
Thursdays, October 10 to November 21,
6 p.m. to 7 p.m.

NOVEMBER

- › **Workshop:** Strength & Vitality Through Traditional Chinese Medicine & Qigong
Wednesday, November 12,
1 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.

DECEMBER

- › **Workshop:** Feeling Good! Reconnect to Your Body with Dance
Sunday, December 1,
12 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.
- › **Workshop:** Ayurveda for Gut Health: Eat & Be Merry
Monday, December 9,
6 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.

