Understanding Complementary Therapies
A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends
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Understanding Complementary Therapies is reviewed approximately every three years. Check the publication date above to ensure this copy of the booklet is up to date. To obtain a more recent copy, phone Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20.

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Cancer Council Queensland
Cancer Council Queensland is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation that provides information and support free of charge for people with cancer and their families and friends throughout Queensland. These services are made possible through the generous donations of Queenslanders and we thank them for their continued support.

If you would like to know more about the information and support services provided by Cancer Council Queensland, call our Helpline on 13 11 20, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

Cancer Council Queensland
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Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20
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ACN 009 784 356 Charity number: CH0450
Introduction

This booklet has been prepared to help you understand more about complementary therapies.

There are many reasons why people with cancer consider using complementary therapies, which are generally used in combination with conventional cancer treatment. They may offer you physical, emotional and spiritual support, reduce side effects from medical treatment, and improve quality of life.

This booklet provides an overview of the role of complementary therapies in cancer care. It does not include information about alternative therapies, which are used instead of conventional treatment. If you want to try complementary therapies, you should discuss this with your doctors and health professionals.

This booklet does not need to be read from cover to cover – just read the parts that are useful to you. Some terms that may be unfamiliar are explained in the glossary. You may also like to pass this booklet to your family and friends for their information.

How this booklet was developed
The information in this booklet was developed with help from health professionals and from the findings of research studies.

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 can arrange telephone support in different languages for non-English speakers. You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) direct on 13 14 50.
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What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease of the cells, which are the body’s basic building blocks. Our bodies constantly make new cells to help us grow, to replace worn-out cells and to heal damaged cells after an injury.

Normally cells grow and multiply in an orderly way, but sometimes something goes wrong with this process and cells grow in an uncontrolled way. This uncontrolled growth may result in a lump called a tumour or may develop into abnormal blood cells.

A tumour can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer). A benign tumour does not spread to other parts of the body. However, a malignant tumour is made up of cancer cells, which are able to spread. The cancer that first develops in a tissue or organ is called the primary cancer.

How cancer starts

- Normal cells
- Abnormal cells
- Cancer in-situ
- Angiogenesis

Normal cells to abnormal cells to cancer in-situ to malignant or invasive cancer.
When it first develops, a malignant tumour may not have invaded nearby tissue. This is known as a cancer in-situ, carcinoma in-situ or localised cancer. As the tumour grows, it may spread and become what is known as invasive cancer.

Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body by travelling through the bloodstream or the lymphatic system. They may continue to grow into another tumour at this new site. This is called a secondary cancer or metastasis.

A metastasis keeps the name of the original cancer. For example, breast cancer that has spread to the liver is still called breast cancer, even though the person may be experiencing symptoms caused by problems in the liver.

### How cancer spreads

- **Primary cancer**
- **Local invasion**
- **Angiogenesis** – tumours grow their own blood vessels
- **Lymph vessel**
- **Metastasis** – cells invade other parts of the body via blood vessels and lymph vessels
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of treatment</th>
<th>Conventional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What it is also called</strong></td>
<td>Medical, proven, orthodox, standard, mainstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How it is used</strong></td>
<td>Used alone or in combination. The treatment you have depends on the type, stage and location of the cancer, your age and general health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How it works</strong></td>
<td>Slows or stops the growth and spread of cancer and provides relief from symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
<td>Surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and immunotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Based on scientific evidence and successful clinical trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More information</strong></td>
<td>Call Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary medicine, holistic therapies, natural therapies, traditional therapies or traditional medicine</td>
<td>Unproven or unconventional treatments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used together with conventional treatments</td>
<td>Used in place of conventional treatments. May be promoted as a cancer cure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the whole person not just the cancer. May help people cope better with symptoms of cancer and side effects caused by conventional treatments</td>
<td>Not known. Using alternative therapies in place of conventional treatment could delay or stop the cancer being treated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acupuncture, aromatherapy, art therapy, massage, meditation, support groups and yoga – see full list on page 25</td>
<td>Microwave therapy, ozone therapy, magnet therapy, coffee enemas, Gerson diet, high-dose vitamin supplements, laetrile, shark cartilage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some used for hundreds or thousands of years but little or no scientific evidence. Research is increasing</td>
<td>Many have not been scientifically tested, so there is no proof that they work; others have been disproven in studies. Side effects are not always known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for further information on treatments for cancer
What is the evidence?

Conventional cancer treatments have been through a range of tests to prove their safety and effectiveness. New treatments are first tested in laboratories and then on large groups of people in what is called a clinical trial.

The strongest evidence comes from clinical trials that involve two groups of people. One group is given the new treatment and the other group is given the existing standard treatment. The two groups are compared. Results are published in medical journals whose articles are evaluated by independent experts (peer-reviewed). If the new treatment works better than existing options, it becomes the standard treatment. This process provides the scientific evidence for the treatment.

Although some complementary therapies have little, or no, scientific evidence to support their use for cancer, they have been used for hundreds or thousands of years for various ailments and conditions. Their effectiveness has been based on trial and error, and this knowledge has been passed down by word of mouth.

With the increasing use of complementary therapies, many therapies are now being tested scientifically to see how well they actually work, and why they are effective.

Integrative medicine is when conventional treatments are combined with evidence-based complementary therapies.
Q: Who uses complementary therapies?

A: Complementary therapies are widely used by people with cancer in Australia. A study conducted in 2010 showed that two out of three people with cancer used at least one form of complementary therapy during or after their cancer treatment. Results from earlier studies range from 17.1%–52%. (See page 87 for references.) The difference may be due to the types of complementary therapies included in the studies.

Studies show that women are the most common users of complementary therapies, and the longer someone has had cancer, the more likely they are to try them.

Q: Why do people use these therapies?

A: There are many reasons why people diagnosed with cancer use complementary therapies. For many, it is important to try as many options as possible. Other reasons include:

- wanting a healthier lifestyle
- feeling more in control
- helping improve the side effects of treatment
- boosting the immune system to help fight infection
- strengthening the body to cope with surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy
- trying to reduce the need for invasive, painful or expensive conventional treatments
- liking the idea of treating the whole person
I wanted to do something positive for myself, so I saw a traditional Chinese medicine therapist. I don’t know whether it was because I felt empowered or whether it was actually the herbs, but compared to other people I knew going through the same type of conventional treatment, I felt I was faring pretty well. Esther (breast cancer)

Q: Which therapies work?
A: Cancer Council supports complementary therapies that have been proven to be safe and effective in scientific (clinical) studies. Not all therapies in this book have been proven to be clinically effective, but personal (anecdotal) evidence from people with cancer suggests they are beneficial. Evidence supporting the different therapies is included in their individual descriptions in the Mind-body techniques, Body-based practices, Therapies using herbs, Therapies based on diet and Other therapies sections.

In clinical trials, some therapies have been shown to be helpful for the various effects of cancer and its treatment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementary therapy</th>
<th>Evidence-based use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meditation, relaxation</td>
<td>help reduce stress, anxiety and depression, improve self-esteem and quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counselling, support groups</td>
<td>help reduce stress, anxiety, depression and pain, and improve quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art and music therapy</td>
<td>improve quality of life, aid relaxation and expression of feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spiritual practices</td>
<td>help reduce stress, instil peace and improve ability to manage challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>massage</td>
<td>may help reduce pain, anxiety, depression, nausea and muscle tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aromatherapy</td>
<td>aids relaxation and reduces anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acupuncture</td>
<td>reduces nausea, vomiting, and improves quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yoga and physical activity</td>
<td>improve quality of life, sleep, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tai chi</td>
<td>relieves pain, improves flexibility and strength, and reduces stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qi gong</td>
<td>improves quality of life and the body's immune system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>herbal medicine</td>
<td>increases energy, reduces fatigue, improves blood counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nutrition</td>
<td>helps wounds and damaged tissue to heal better, improves the body's immune system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Complementary therapy use in palliative care**

Complementary therapies are often used by palliative care patients to help them feel better physically and emotionally. Many specialist palliative care services offer complementary therapies – most often mind-body and touch therapies – as part of their supportive care for patients and their carers.

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**Q: Should I tell my doctor?**

**A:** Yes. Discuss any therapy you may be using or are thinking about using with your doctors. You need to tell your doctors before you start using the complementary therapy, especially if you are having chemotherapy or radiotherapy or taking medication. See page 64 for more information.

Most doctors and specialists support the use of evidence-based complementary therapies used together with your conventional cancer treatment.

---

**Q: Are they safe?**

**A:** Many complementary therapies are usually safe to use together with conventional cancer treatment. However, they can occasionally cause side effects in some people. Some complementary therapies might stop conventional treatments working as well as they should. See the individual therapies information (pages 26–58) for more details on the potential side effects and other considerations.
Safety of alternative therapies

Some alternative practitioners encourage people to stop using conventional cancer treatment. Be wary of the following:

- The practitioner has no formal qualifications or studied at an unaccredited college or university.
- The practitioner is not registered with a state or national governing body or a professional association.
- The practitioner tells you not to have conventional treatment, or that medical treatment will stop their treatment from working. They may claim their treatment cures all cancers.
- The practitioner asks you not to talk to your doctors about the treatment, or won’t tell you the ingredients.
- The practitioner says there are clinical studies for the remedy’s effectiveness but does not show you proof.
- The treatment costs a lot of money or you need to pay in advance for several months supply of a remedy.
- You need to travel overseas to have the treatment.

Regulation of medicinal products

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is a federal department that regulates all medicines sold in Australia, including medicinal products containing herbs, vitamins or minerals, nutritional supplements, homoeopathic remedies and flower remedies.

Before they are sold in Australia, all therapeutic goods – whether manufactured in Australia or overseas – are assessed by the TGA. Approved goods are given a code depending on their level of risk:

- **Aust L (listed)** – The product is considered low risk and has been assessed for safety and quality but not for how well it works (efficacy). Most herbal and nutritional products will have an Aust L code.

- **Aust R (registered)** – The product is considered higher risk and has been assessed for safety, quality, and efficacy. The few complementary therapies that have this code are usually manufactured by pharmaceutical companies.

The quality of products made with natural ingredients are affected by many factors – such as country of origin, extracts, soil and environment quality, time of harvest, storage, transport and manufacturing processes.

The TGA’s work helps to protect the public by ensuring commercially prepared products are manufactured according to their code of Good Manufacturing Practice and for the reporting
and assessment of adverse reactions to medicines. TGA classifies raw or loose herbs as foods, so these are not as closely scrutinised as manufactured products. When raw herbs are imported into Australia, they are inspected by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) to verify the identity of what is being brought in to the country and to assess its quality.

If you buy products from overseas – for example, on the internet or from a friend – their safety, quality and efficacy cannot be guaranteed by TGA or AQIS (see page 49 for more safety tips).


Regulation of complementary therapists

In Australia some complementary therapists are regulated by national legislation.

**Chinese medicine practitioners, acupuncturists, Chinese herbal medicine dispensers** – These practitioners are members of the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia, which is part of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). AHPRA is governed by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009 and regulates 10 National Health Practitioner Boards. This means that practitioners must be adequately qualified to practise.
Naturopaths and herbalists – These practitioners are covered by the Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists. This self-governing body maintains a register that makes choosing a naturopath or a Western herbalist safer.

Q: What should I do if something goes wrong?

A: If you have any side effects that you think are from a complementary treatment, talk to your practitioner. They should work out how to change your treatment to reduce the chance of the problem recurring. If the issue is unable to be resolved, or if you think the practitioner has been negligent, incompetent or unethical, consider the following options:

- If the practitioner belongs to a professional association, contact the association with a formal complaint. They may be able to investigate and decide what action to take based on the evidence provided by you and the practitioner.

- Report adverse reactions directly to the Adverse Medicines Events Line on 1300 134 237. You can also tell your doctor, who will report it to the TGA.

- Contact your state-based health care complaints commission. This organisation protects public health and safety by independently investigating and resolving complaints about health care providers. It can also prosecute serious complaints.
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<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
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<td><strong>ACT</strong></td>
<td>Human Rights Commission 02 6205 2222 <a href="http://www.hrc.act.gov.au">www.hrc.act.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NSW</strong></td>
<td>Health Care Complaints Commission 1800 043 159 <a href="http://www.hccc.nsw.gov.au">www.hccc.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NT</strong></td>
<td>Health and Community Services Complaints Commission 1800 004 474 <a href="http://www.hcscc.nt.gov.au">www.hcscc.nt.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QLD</strong></td>
<td>Health Quality and Complaints Commission 1800 077 308 <a href="http://www.hqcc.qld.gov.au">www.hqcc.qld.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SA</strong></td>
<td>Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner 1800 232 007 <a href="http://www.hcscc.sa.gov.au">www.hcscc.sa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TAS</strong></td>
<td>Health Complaints Commissioner 1800 001 170 <a href="http://www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au">www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WA</strong></td>
<td>Health and Disability Services Complaints Office 08 6551 7600 1800 813 583 country free call <a href="http://www.hadsco.wa.gov.au">www.hadsco.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key points

• Complementary therapies are widely used in Australia. It’s estimated that two out of three people with cancer use some type of complementary therapy during or after their cancer treatment.

• Examples include massage, support groups, music therapy, meditation, aromatherapy, acupuncture, music therapy and qi gong.

• People may have more than one reason for using a complementary therapy. Some reasons include trying as many options as possible, feeling more in control, seeking to feel better, and coping with cancer and its treatment.

• Complementary therapies are often based on traditional knowledge. There is less scientific evidence available about their safety and effectiveness than for conventional treatments.

• The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing’s Therapeutic Goods Administration is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods sold in Australia. These include medicines, herbal and nutritional supplements, flower remedies and homoeopathic medicines.

• Approved herbal and nutritional products have an Aust L code, which means they are considered low risk. The products are assessed for how safe they are but not how well they work.

• It is important to tell your doctor and your complementary therapist about all drugs, herbs, nutritional supplements and other remedies you take. Herbs and conventional treatments can sometimes interact, stopping the drug from working properly or causing side effects.
Holistic approaches to health care

Most types of complementary therapies are part of wider holistic health care systems. Holistic health care aims to treat a person as a whole and not just treat the symptoms of the disease.

In Australia the main traditional holistic health care systems practised are: naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), homoeopathy and ayurvedic medicine. Their origins differ, but they share similar beliefs:

- The body needs to be balanced physically, emotionally and spiritually to be healthy.
- Ill health often has more than one cause.
- The body has a vital energy reflecting its level of health and wellbeing.
- The body can heal itself.
- Health care must be tailored to the individual.

Naturopathy

What it is: Naturopathy maintains that the mind, body and spirit are all connected, and that the body can heal itself through dietary and lifestyle changes. Many of the underlying principles of naturopathy, such as the importance of diet and exercise, are also part of conventional medicine.

Naturopathy finds and treats both the cause and effect of symptoms using a combination of dietary changes, bodywork and herbal medicines or nutritional supplements.
**What to expect:** After taking a detailed case history, a naturopath may suggest a combination of diet changes, bodywork or exercise, and herbal, homoeopathic or nutritional remedies.

**Evidence:** The benefits of some aspects of naturopathy, such as massage and nutrition, have good clinical evidence for people with cancer; other aspects, such as herbal medicine, have mixed levels of evidence. See individual therapies for more information.

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**Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)**

**What it is:** Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) looks at the connection between mind, body and environment to prevent and manage diseases, such as cancer.

TCM practitioners consider the person's overall condition, not just the symptoms. It may help people with cancer strengthen their vital force and cope with the side effects of conventional treatment. TCM includes acupressure, acupuncture, qi gong, tai chi and the use of foods and herbs to improve health.

**What to expect:** A TCM practitioner will take a case history and may do a physical examination, including pulse or tongue analysis, to work out the flow of energy and imbalances in your body. Treatment may include acupuncture, massage and herbal remedies.

**Evidence:** Some aspects of TCM have convincing clinical evidence of their benefits for people with cancer. See individual therapies for further information.
**Beliefs behind TCM**

According to Chinese medicine and other medical systems from Asia, everyone has a vital energy or vital force known as qi (pronounced ‘chee’). Qi is said to flow through the body along pathways called meridians. If the flow of qi becomes unbalanced, this can lead to physical and emotional disease or discomfort.

Qi is made up of two opposite and complementary factors known as ‘yin and yang’.

In TCM, the belief is that there is yin and yang in everything. Yin is represented by water and yang by fire. The balance of yin and yang maintains harmony in your body, mind and the universe.

TCM also uses the theory of five elements – fire, earth, metal, water, and wood – to explain how the body works. These elements correspond to particular organs and tissues in the body.

**Homoeopathy**

**What it is:** Homoeopathy is based on the theory of ‘like cures like’. It tries to stimulate the body’s ability to heal itself by giving small doses of highly diluted substances. In larger doses these substances would produce the illness or symptoms. Homoeopathic remedies come as tablets, liquids or creams.

**What to expect:** Homoeopathy aims to treat the whole person. Since all people are unique, the characteristics of both the person and their symptoms are taken into account when homoeopathic medicines are prescribed. See page 57 for information on evidence.
Tania’s story

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003. I’d used Chinese herbs and acupuncture for a long time, so I wanted to know whether I could avoid conventional cancer treatment. My therapist advised me against this and she offered to work with my medical team.

I agreed to have surgery, followed by chemotherapy and hormone-suppressant medication. When I spoke to my oncologist about using complementary therapies, he said he couldn’t stop me, but he wanted my therapist to know about my medical treatment.

I had acupuncture the day before my operation to help reduce the stress my body would be put under. After surgery, my therapist came to the hospital and gave me acupuncture in my legs to help build my blood, clear toxins from my body and restore my energy. Later, I also had acupuncture for the nausea caused by chemotherapy, and for the hot flushes and lethargy I had from going through a drug-induced menopause.

My therapist also gave me Chinese herbs depending on my symptoms. For constipation, I had a laxative formula that was gentler and more effective than the conventional laxative I had been prescribed. Pears and pear juice helped the constipation, and my therapist also suggested ways to improve my diet and choose foods that were rich in nutrients and fibre. I ate red fruits and vegetables to improve the health of my blood.

Comparing my experience to others in my support group, I feel I benefited from my TCM therapist’s contribution. My side effects didn’t seem as bad as other people’s and it was great to have someone else looking at the bigger picture of my health and recovery.
Ayurvedic medicine

What it is: Ayurvedic medicine is an ancient Indian system of medicine. It is based on the foundation that health is achieved when the mind, body and spirit are in balance. Practitioners use a wide range of therapies including nutrition and herbal medicine, massage, meditation and yoga.

What to expect: An ayurvedic practitioner takes a detailed case history and assesses vital force and balance in the body, often using pulse and tongue analysis. Treatment may include one or more of the therapies above.

Evidence: There is good evidence for some of the treatments that are part of ayurvedic medicine, such as massage, meditation and yoga. There is limited clinical evidence on the herbal remedies and certain diets used by ayurvedic therapists.

Remedies from different cultures

Australia’s cultural diversity means some people may want to use traditional healing practices as part of their complementary cancer care. For example, some Indigenous people with cancer may want the guidance of a traditional doctor or elder who is familiar with bush medicine and Aboriginal spirituality.

If you want to use traditional remedies from your culture, you need to discuss this with your doctor and ask the same questions as you would for the other types of complementary therapies listed in this booklet.
Key points

• Most types of complementary therapies are part of wider holistic health care systems.

• The main systems practised in Australia are naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), homoeopathy and ayurvedic medicine.

• While the origins of these systems vary, they share a similar belief that the body needs to be balanced physically, emotionally and spiritually to be healthy.

• Naturopathy maintains that a balanced diet and lifestyle can help the body heal itself.

• Some aspects of naturopathy, such as massage and nutrition, have good clinical evidence for people with cancer; other aspects such as herbal medicine, have mixed levels of evidence.

• Traditional Chinese medicine looks at the connection between mind, body and environment to prevent and manage diseases, such as cancer.

• TCM is based on the belief that qi (pronounced ‘chee’) energy is essential for good health. When you are ill, qi is unbalanced.

• Examples of TCM include acupressure, acupuncture, qi gong and tai chi. Some aspects of these have good levels of evidence.

• Homoeopathy is based on the theory of treating like with like. Scientific studies have shown mixed results.

• Ayurvedic medicine is an ancient Indian system of medicine. There is strong evidence to support the use of some ayurvedic methods, such as yoga, massage and relaxation. There is limited evidence for some herbal treatments and certain diets.
## Types of therapies

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* Some therapies may fit into more than one category
Mind-body techniques

Mind-body techniques are based on the belief that what we think and feel can affect our physical and mental wellbeing.

Examples of mind-body techniques include counselling, support groups, hypnotherapy, relaxation, meditation, visualisation, art therapy and music therapy.

Some techniques, such as counselling and support groups, have now become part of standard cancer care. Spirituality is also discussed because of the important part it plays in many people’s lives and its value in providing emotional support.

Mind-body techniques may also be called psychological techniques, emotional therapies or spiritual healing.

The mind-body connection

The mind and the body are linked. When our emotions or mental state are under pressure, our physical body can be affected. Similarly, physical symptoms can have a negative impact on our mood and mental wellbeing.

Many complementary therapies focus on the mind-body connection in different ways. Acupuncture, tai chi, qi gong, yoga and massage can help with both emotional and physical problems. However, as these techniques are firstly directed at the physical body (e.g. needling pressure points or moving the limbs into a certain pose), they are described further in the Body-based practices chapter (see page 36).
**Benefits:** Scientific studies suggest that mind-body techniques can benefit people who have cancer or are recovering from it. Some therapies allow people to explore the emotions that friends and family may not be able to relate to. Evidence also shows that mind-body techniques may reduce the symptoms and side effects of cancer and its treatment. These include pain, anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, depression, fear and difficulty sleeping (insomnia), which can all affect mood and overall wellbeing. Using self-help techniques may help people feel more in control of their situation, more relaxed and less fearful of the future.

Mind-body techniques give you the opportunity to discuss your thoughts, feelings and concerns in a safe and confidential environment. You may find using these techniques gives you relief, or a sense of peace or understanding.

**Side effects:** Sometimes people feel overwhelmed by the emotions they experience during or after a session. This usually settles soon afterwards. If not, contact your therapist for further support and advice.

- Ask your doctor for a referral or recommendation to a psychologist or counsellor.
- See page 31 to find out how counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists are different.
- Speak to other people or read about different therapies to get an insight into what might appeal to you based on your values, attitudes and needs.
Relaxation and meditation

What they are: Relaxation usually includes slow breathing and muscle-loosening exercises to physically and mentally relax the body. Meditation is an ancient practice that involves holding your attention on a subject such as breathing. There are many different types of meditation. Mindfulness meditation means being aware and present in each moment. Guided imagery, or visualisation, uses your imagination to create healing thoughts.

Why use them: Relaxation and meditation may help to release muscle tension, and reduce stress and anxiety.

What to expect: Lying or sitting in a comfortable position, you are led through a series of exercises that focus on breath work and calming the mind. Often, serene music is played to create a peaceful environment. After a period of relaxation, you will usually be prompted to stay awake to enjoy your relaxed feeling.

Evidence: Many clinical studies have shown that people having chemotherapy, radiotherapy and other cancer treatments benefit from relaxation. It can help reduce anxiety, stress, pain and depression. Studies on meditation have shown it helps people with cancer feel more positive, and can reduce anxiety and nausea.

Some hospitals, cancer support groups and community centres offer relaxation or meditation groups. There are also many self-help CDs and DVDs that will guide you through the different techniques.
Support groups

What they are: Organised groups where people with cancer and their families can meet other people going through a similar experience.

Why use them: Getting in touch with other people living with cancer can be very beneficial. Groups offer practical and emotional support and can be helpful at all stages of cancer.

What to expect: In these support settings, most people feel they can speak openly and share their experiences with others.

Evidence: There is strong evidence that cancer support groups improve quality of life. Cancer Council’s research found joining a group helps reduce distress, depression and anxiety. Recently, other studies have shown people using online health forums also benefit.

Types of support services*

**Face-to-face support groups** – often held in community centres or hospitals

**Online discussion forums** – where people can connect with each other at any time – see [www.cancerconnections.com.au](http://www.cancerconnections.com.au)

**Telephone support groups** – for certain situations or types of cancer, which trained counsellors facilitate

**Peer support programs** – match you with a trained volunteer who has had a similar cancer experience, e.g. Cancer Connect.

*Not available in all areas*
Counselling

What it is: Through discussions with a counsellor or psychologist, you can identify problems and explore ways of resolving negative thoughts and feelings that impact on your health and day-to-day life.

Why use it: Counselling allows you to express your emotions in a safe, objective environment, helping to improve self-esteem, communication, relationships and specific difficulties.

What to expect: Consultations are usually face to face, but if you live remotely or require crisis counselling, you may be able to talk with your therapist over the phone.

A counsellor will ask questions about the problems you are facing and will help you to clarify your thoughts so you can work out how to resolve these challenges yourself. Sometimes a counsellor will simply provide a non-judgemental, listening ear to allow you to talk through events that have caused you confusion, grief, anger, anxiety, guilt or conflicting emotions.

Evidence: There is long-established evidence of the benefits of counselling, however, it is important people find a suitably qualified therapist they feel comfortable talking with. To find a therapist, speak to your GP.

No matter how good your support people are, sometimes you need someone who’s professionally trained. Wendy (bowel cancer)
Differences between counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists

**Counsellor** – A counsellor’s education may range from a vocational certificate in counselling through to university level studies in psychology or social work. There is no standard of qualifications required. Counsellors listen to clients’ problems, offer support and help them come up with strategies for dealing with problems. They usually work in a similar way to a psychologist who has specialised in counselling. Counsellors do not prescribe medication, but if they are also qualified in a complementary therapies discipline, such as herbal medicine or flower remedies, they may dispense these as part of their treatment plan.

**Psychologist** – A registered psychologist in Australia must complete four years of psychology at an undergraduate level, followed by either postgraduate studies in psychology or two years of supervised clinical practice. Psychologists who specialise in counselling use their understanding of the working of the mind to guide clients through issues with how they think, feel and learn. They cannot prescribe medication.

**Psychiatrist** – A psychiatrist is a trained medical doctor who has specialised in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness. As well as discussing issues with a client, a psychiatrist may prescribe medication to help a range of mental and emotional conditions. If you are severely depressed, you may be referred to a psychiatrist, who can work through coping strategies with you and may prescribe antidepressants.

Ask Medicare if you’re eligible for a rebate.
**Hypnotherapy**

**What it is:** Deep relaxation is used to help people become more aware of their inner thoughts. This can help them overcome mental blocks that have previously stopped them from dealing with anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, pain, insomnia and unwanted habits.

**Why use it:** Hypnotherapy can improve mental wellbeing and quality of life.

**What to expect:** Your therapist will take a case history and then lead you into a deeply relaxed state, known as an altered state of consciousness. Being in a relaxed state allows your subconscious to focus on your treatment goals, which then become more achievable for your conscious mind.

**Evidence:** Hypnotherapy has been clinically tested with good results for helping people cope with pain and anxiety. Some studies show promising results for women who had a brief session before surgery, helping them cope with pain and nausea after surgery.

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**Art therapy**

**What it is:** It is a way of using visual art to express feelings. An art therapist helps you explore the images you have created to encourage understanding of your emotions and concerns.

**Why use it:** You can work through issues that surface from your art. Other benefits include solving problems, improved mood and stress reduction.
**What to expect:** Art therapy may be done individually or in groups; some hospitals run programs. You do not need artistic talent to participate or benefit – the emphasis is in the production of a work, not the end result. Your art may be created any way: drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or digitally. You will have an opportunity to discuss the work with the therapist – either the process of producing it or what the end result means to you.

**Evidence:** Anecdotal evidence suggests art therapy improves coping, emotional wellbeing and quality of life.

"The most significant change that occurred for me from art therapy was finding a way to express difficult feelings. Sometimes there aren’t words to describe what you’ve been through. Yet, art therapy helped me find a way to share my experience. It was very positive." *Ray (prostate cancer)*

**Music therapy**

**What it is:** It uses music to improve health and wellbeing. A music therapist helps people engage with different aspects of music.

**Why use it:** Music therapy can help people express themselves, feel more in control, focus on healing, feel less anxious, and just enjoy themselves in the moment.

**What to expect:** This therapy is used in several cancer centres around Australia. You don’t need to be musical to participate or
benefit. The way a music therapy session is conducted will depend on the needs of the participants. You may play instruments, sing or write lyrics, or you can simply listen to music and discuss how it has affected you.

Evidence: Some studies show that music therapy can help people with cancer improve their quality of life by making them feel better and by reducing side effects of treatment such as anxiety and nausea.

Life coaching
What it is: Life coaching is about helping people develop their personal, spiritual, physical and professional lives. It encourages people to live enjoyable lives, and is focused on finding solutions and getting results.

Why use it: Life coaching allows people to make positive changes for their future.

What to expect: Your life coach will help you clarify your thoughts about what you want in life, and to reassess your beliefs, values and rules that may have prevented you from experiencing fulfilment in the past. Sessions can be face to face, over the phone or over the internet.

Evidence: There is limited clinical evidence available about the benefits of life coaching. However exploratory studies have shown that people using life coaching can have a better quality of life.
Spirituality

What it is: Spirituality is a very individual concept. For some, it may mean being part of an organised religion such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism. For others, spirituality may reflect their own individual beliefs about the universe and their place in it, or a search for meaning and purpose to their lives. Often when people are diagnosed with cancer, this aspect of their lives becomes more important.

Why use it: People often find comfort in prayer, meditation or quiet contemplation. Receiving pastoral care from a religious or spiritual adviser or a hospital chaplain can often help people, even if they are not part of an organised religion.

What to expect: If you are part of a spiritual or religious community, you may benefit from:

- prayer or meditation groups
- a feeling of unity from the congregation
- healing services for the sick
- practical and spiritual support offered by members of your religious community.

Evidence: There is growing scientific evidence of a positive link between spirituality and health.

Spirituality was very important to me. I had a strong support network at my church and I really believe my faith in God helped me through.

Esther (breast cancer)
Body-based practices

Body-based practices, including energy therapies, can be divided into two categories:

- **Passive bodywork techniques (see pages 37–40)** – include therapies where some form of touch or manual pressure is applied to your body or the unseen energy field surrounding your body – for example massage, aromatherapy and reflexology.

- **Active exercise techniques (see pages 43–47)** – require you to actively undertake a series of movements to stimulate and stretch different parts of the body. Examples include yoga, tai chi and qi gong.

More vigorous manipulative techniques, such as chiropractic and osteopathy, are not covered in this booklet.

**Benefits:** The benefits of body-based practices include reducing stress, tension, anxiety, insomnia, pain, and increasing energy, vitality, quality of life and wellbeing. Exercise – even if gentle – can also improve stamina, muscle tone, flexibility and agility. The exercise techniques in this chapter have a strong mind-body connection too, so they benefit both physical and emotional health.

Body-based practices may also be referred to as bodywork or physical, manual, stimulatory, structural, tactile, touch, manipulative or exercise therapies. Techniques involving energy work are sometimes called energy therapies.
Massage

What it is: Massage involves moving (manipulating) muscles and rubbing or stroking soft tissues of the body.

Why use it: There are many styles of massage. They all aim to promote deep relaxation in tissue by applying pressure to the muscles and pressure points of the body. This helps to release both muscular and emotional tension. Some types of massage can reduce lymphoedema.

What to expect: The therapist uses a variety of strokes on different parts of the body. When performing massage on a person with cancer, therapists need to adjust their pressure and avoid certain areas of the body. Some styles of massage are done with you fully clothed; others usually require you to undress to your underwear so the therapist can apply oil to your skin to enable easy movement of hands.

Evidence: Many scientific studies have shown massage can reduce pain, anxiety, depression and nausea in people who have had chemotherapy or surgery for cancer.

Call 13 11 20 for free information on massage and cancer.

Having regular massage means that someone else is keeping an eye on my lymphatic arm to assess changes. It’s also helped me maintain my mobility and flexibility, and relieves discomfort and tightness. *Pam (breast cancer)*
Rodney’s story

In 2002 I was diagnosed with a form of leukaemia called Burkitt’s lymphoma. It’s a highly aggressive tumour and required several bouts of chemotherapy over a five-month period. I was hospitalised for three of those months. The chemotherapy left me with a mild form of neuropathy, which is nerve pain and numbness.

Two years later, I still had slight numbness in my feet and I had trouble solving problems quickly. At times I felt I was very simple, especially when I was tired. My specialist felt that I was not likely to improve.

In late 2004 I met a reflexologist. I had never heard of this form of therapy. That same night, I received a phone call from a friend who was undergoing treatment for breast cancer. She indicated that some of her fellow patients, also suffering from neuropathy, had received some benefit from reflexology.

I looked up reflexology on the internet and then spoke with my GP who was supportive of me trying it. I then rang the reflexologist for an appointment.

I have had about 20 sessions over a three-year period with my reflexologist. The neuropathy has improved, although not completely. I have also suffered from depression, and the reflexologist’s support has complemented other treatments for this condition.

I’ve found reflexology to be a positive part of my recovery. I found myself to be at complete peace and fully relaxed during the treatment sessions. I wish I had started reflexology earlier and I would have appreciated having reflexology in the hospital when I was having chemotherapy.
Reflexology

**What it is:** A form of foot and hand massage. Reflexologists believe that certain points on the feet and hands correspond to the body’s internal organs and systems, like a map.

**Why use it:** Many people find reflexology relaxing. By pressing on reflex points, energy meridians are unblocked and healthy changes can occur in the corresponding parts of the body.

**What to expect:** After talking through your case history, you remove your footwear and lie down. The reflexologist works with their hands on your bare feet, possibly using cream or oil. Usually reflexology feels like a relaxing foot massage, although sometimes the therapist’s touch can be subtle.

**Evidence:** Several clinical trials have looked at using reflexology to help with cancer symptoms such as pain and anxiety. Results are mixed and studies involved small groups of people so it is difficult to say if the reflexology had any effect.

Aromatherapy

**What it is:** This is the use of aromatic essential oils extracted from plants for healing relaxation. They are used mainly during massage but can also be used in baths, inhalations or vaporisers (oil burners).

**Why use it:** When inhaled or absorbed through the skin, the oil stimulates positive effects on different systems in the body.
What to expect: The aromatherapist blends essential oils and adds them to a base (carrier) oil to apply to your skin during a massage. They may also be used in an oil burner or a warm bath. Different blends have different effects on your moods or symptoms you are experiencing, such as fatigue, pain, sleeplessness or nausea. If a particular aroma is unpleasant, let your therapist know.

Evidence: Some studies have shown reduced anxiety and depression in people with cancer. Studies in people with advanced cancer also show aromatherapy improves quality of life by reducing depression.

Oils used in bodywork

Base oils and essential oils may be used in bodywork. Base (or carrier) oils allow the therapist to work on the skin easily. They are usually made from kernels or nuts, such as almonds. Some therapists use mineral oil, as it is odourless.

Essential oils, such as lavender or tea tree, can be added to base oils. They should not be swallowed or used directly on the skin undiluted.

Different blends are suitable for different moods and energy levels, and may help a range of ailments, such as difficulty with sleeping.

Problems from oils are rare, but some people find they irritate the skin or the smell makes them feel nauseous. Let your therapist know if you have had reactions to oils in the past, or if you start to feel discomfort during a massage.
Energy therapies

What they are: They work on the concept that everyone has an energy field and unblocking it restores balance. Techniques include:
- Bowen therapy
- polarity therapy
- reiki
- healing touch
- therapeutic touch.

Why use them: Energy therapies are used by some people with cancer, as they are very gentle and do not require the therapist to make many adjustments. The aim is to increase energy levels and promote relaxation and wellbeing.

What to expect: Usually a client sits or lies down fully clothed. The therapist may gently touch you or may hold their hands slightly above your body. The aim is to use their own healing energy to identify energy imbalances and promote health. This may generate a feeling of warmth.

Sometimes therapists perform different moves on or above the body – these are believed to stimulate the flow of energy. The session is usually very restful.

Evidence: Clinical research has not proven the idea of an energy field within or surrounding the body. However personal stories (anecdotal evidence) show energy therapies provide a deep sense of calm and relaxation, often helping to relieve pain and anxiety, reduce stiffness and improve posture.
Acupuncture

What it is: Acupuncturists put fine, sterile needles just under the skin into points or apply a laser probe on acupuncture points along the meridian channels in the body.

Why use it: Traditional Chinese acupuncture is based on the theory that this unblocks and moves qi (energy) to strengthen vital force (see page 21) and reduce physical and emotional symptoms. Western Chinese or medical acupuncture is an interpretation of acupuncture. It works on the theory that the needles stimulate nerves to release the body’s own natural chemicals, which help reduce pain or regulate the brain and other functions.

What to expect: After a consultation, which may include tongue and pulse analysis, the practitioner gently positions sterile needles into points on your body. The needles are left in place for 30 seconds to 30 minutes, and may be turned. You may feel a tingling or dull aching sensation, but should not feel pain. Acupuncturists may also implant and cover special needles, which can remain in place for several days. These needles can be pressed to relieve some symptoms such as insomnia or nausea.

I went to an acupuncturist to help improve my blood counts and vitality. I also had remedial shiatsu to settle my stomach, improve my appetite, reduce constipation and help ‘put the pieces back together’ that felt fragmented after chemotherapy. Julie (breast cancer)
**Evidence:** The main areas of research into acupuncture for cancer are chemotherapy-related nausea and cancer pain, and several clinical trials have shown good results. Low-strength evidence indicates that acupuncture could ease breathlessness in advanced stages of cancer. Anecdotal evidence suggests acupuncture is relaxing and reduces anxiety.

Many GPs and other health practitioners are trained to perform acupuncture.

**Yoga**

**What it is:** Yoga involves performing poses with the body, slowing and deepening the breath, and focusing the mind. Yoga originated in India but is now popular around the world. There are many styles of yoga with varying intensity – from gentle, such as hatha yoga to vigorous, such as ashtanga yoga/Iyengar. Some styles may not be suitable during some stages of cancer.

**Why use it:** It helps both physical and emotional health.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. You may be asked to remove your shoes before entering the yoga room. You usually need a yoga mat – this may be available in class.

Most classes last for 1–2 hours. A typical routine involves focusing on quietening the mind and working with the breath.
A session usually begins with warm-up stretches followed by a series of different yoga postures and relaxation at the end of a class.

If you’re new to yoga, it is recommended you start with a beginner class. Always let your yoga teacher know of any treatments you have so they can adjust postures/exercises to suit your needs. You can also seek advice from your medical team.

**Evidence:** Clinical research has shown yoga may improve sleep, decrease stress and enhance quality of life. The focus on breathing may also help reduce pain.

Books, DVDs and videos are useful if you do not have access to a class or you want to practise yoga at home.

**Tai chi**

**What it is:** This is a part of traditional Chinese medicine that combines movement, breath work and meditation. Movements create stability in the body, reflecting an ancient Chinese concept of balance known as ‘yin and yang’ (see page 21 for more details).

**Why use it:** Breath work is calming and meditative, while creating and holding the poses helps loosen and strengthen the muscles.

**What to expect:** If your class is indoors, you will probably do tai chi in bare feet, and there will be serene music playing.
The class usually starts with warm-up exercises. You will be shown different moves and assisted to perform them. The instructor may use names to describe the poses, e.g. ‘white crane raises its wings’. The movements are simple to start with, then become progressively harder, with many parts of the body needing to move to achieve the pose. Classes end with cooling down and relaxation.

**Evidence:** Some studies review tai chi and qi gong together because of the similarities in philosophy and elements. Anecdotal evidence have shown tai chi improves quality of life, balance, agility, flexibility, muscle tone and bone density. It may also help reduce stress and blood pressure.

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**Qi gong**

**What it is:** Qi gong – pronounced ‘chee goong’ – is also part of traditional Chinese medicine. ‘Qi’ means one’s life energy, and ‘gong’ means work. It combines movement with controlled breathing and meditation.

**Why use it:** Movements keep the flow of energy running through the body’s energy channels. This can help generate a sense of wellbeing and peace, as well as improving both mental and physical vitality.

**What to expect:** Wear comfortable clothes. Participants start with warm-up exercises to loosen the body. The instructor then guides you through a series of slow movements, which can range from very simple to complex. The exercises, which are usually...
very calming, help you become more aware of your energy. You might also do some meditation while you are lying, sitting, standing or walking.

**Evidence:** Clinical trials suggest qi gong improves quality of life. Anecdotal evidence suggests it helps reduce anxiety, pain and inflammation, as well as improving general fitness, immunity and fatigue.

"Qi gong was very calming and made me more self-aware. I was more aware of the energy in my body. I found it easier to learn than tai chi so I was able to do it at home as well as going to classes."

*Jann (breast cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma)*

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**Other active exercise techniques**

There are other exercise techniques you might like to explore. Although studies with people who have cancer are limited, they are generally accepted as being beneficial for improving breathing, strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing.

**Alexander technique** – Although not a type of exercise, this approach to balance and wellbeing in mind and body teaches people to be aware of the way they move and hold themselves. By changing the way people use their body, they can enhance their mental and physical functioning on many levels.
Feldenkrais – This method helps people become more aware of the way they move and how this contributes to or compensates for bad posture, pain and mobility restrictions. By gently retraining the mind and body to be open to new possibilities in movement, people find ways to become freer and more comfortable.

Pilates – A program that encourages the mind to be aware of its control over one’s muscles. Using awareness of one’s breath and posture, the method helps to strengthen core muscles and correct postural habits that have contributed to pain, reduced mobility and poor coordination.

Strength training or lifting weights (resistance training) – This active exercise technique is growing in popularity, particularly for people who have had treatment for breast cancer. Recent research shows that breast cancer survivors with lymphoedema who participate in a supervised weight-lifting program do better than people who do not lift weights.

Exercise programs for people with cancer

- YWCA encore is a free eight-week program of gentle exercise and relaxation for people who have had breast cancer. See www.ywcaencore.org.au.
- Dragon boat racing is popular with women who have had breast cancer. It helps to manage lymphoedema, improves fitness and can be a social network. See www.dragonsabreast.com.au.
Therapies using herbs

Herbal medicines use various parts of the plant that cause chemical changes in the body when consumed or applied to the skin to treat disease and promote health. Therapies using herbs can also be called biological therapies or botanical medicine.

**Benefits:** Many scientific studies have examined the effects of various herbs for people with cancer. Some remedies have been proven to reduce side effects from cancer, as well as helping with cancer prevention. Other remedies don’t have scientific backing, but historical usage suggests they may help with wound care, skin conditions, the immune system, digestive function and energy levels.

**Side effects:** Many different types of herbs are available, which may be used alone or in combination. Some may cause unwanted side effects. To learn about the side effects of specific herbs and botanicals see the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre website, www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/about-herbs-botanicals-other-products.

**Do herbs cure cancer?**

There is currently no scientific evidence that herbal remedies can cure or treat cancer. However, some plant extracts have been found to have anti-cancer effects and have been turned into chemotherapy drugs. This includes vincristine from the periwinkle plant and taxanes from the bark of the Pacific yew tree. These plants were refined and sometimes modified from their original form before being tested and used as chemotherapy drugs.
• Buy or use herbal products from qualified practitioners or reputable suppliers.

• Ask for products that are clearly labelled in English with your name, batch number, date, quantity, dosage, directions, safety information if applicable, and your practitioner’s contact details. A product that has been freshly compounded for you is called an extemporaneous preparation and is not available as a retail product.

• Avoid self-prescribing with over-the-counter products from a health food shop, pharmacy or the internet. Products from other countries that are sold over the internet are not subject to the same regulations as those sold in Australia. Some ayurvedic and Chinese products may contain lead, mercury and arsenic in high enough quantities to be considered toxic. See *Regulation of medicinal products* on page 14.

• Make sure you know how to prepare and take your herbs. Like conventional medicine, taking the correct dose at the right time is important for the herbal remedies to work well and safely. Talk to your doctor and complementary health practitioner, or call the National Prescribing Service’s Medicines Line on 1300 633 424 from anywhere in Australia, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm AEST. This service is staffed by registered nurses who provide confidential, independent information about prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines.

• Ask the practitioner for ways to mask the taste of the herbs if you find them bitter.

• If you suspect you have had an adverse reaction to any kind of medicine, call the Adverse Medicine Events Line on 1300 134 237, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm AEST.
Western herbal medicine

What it is: Western herbal medicines are usually made from herbs grown in Europe and North America, but some come from Asia.

Why use it: Herbs are used to help the body work more efficiently, overcome symptoms and improve vitality.

What to expect: After asking you questions, the practitioner puts together a holistic picture of your body’s health. They will look for underlying reasons for your ill health or the symptoms you are experiencing, and then tailor a remedy addressing the causes and symptoms of your illness. A practitioner may dispense pre-packaged herbal formulas or make up a blend of herbs specifically for your needs. Herbal medicines can be prepared as a liquid extract that is taken with a little water or as a tea (infusion). They can also be used in creams, such as calendula cream for wound healing, or powders.

Evidence: Clinical studies on certain herbs show they may help treat anxiety, pain, depression, nausea and digestive problems. However few studies have been conducted for people with cancer with these conditions. Anecdotal evidence suggests herbs increase energy after conventional treatment.

Chinese herbal medicine

What it is: Chinese herbs are a key part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). See page 20–21 for more information on TCM, energy meridians and qi.
**Why use it:** Herbs are given to unblock energy meridians, bring harmony between yin and yang, and restore organ function.

**What to expect:** The practitioner will take a detailed case history and may look at your tongue or take your pulse to assess how your body is out of balance. They will choose a combination of herbs and foods that will help bring your body back into balance. Chinese herbalists select a combination of Chinese herbs to make their own formula or they can dispense pre-packaged herbal medicines. Herbs may be prescribed as tablets or as a blend of herbs, which you make into a tea.

**Evidence:** Like Western herbal medicine, many Chinese herbs for use in the general population have been scientifically evaluated with positive results. Clinical trials in China have also shown that integrating Chinese herbal medicine and conventional cancer therapy may reduce the rate of the cancer spreading or recurring. Evidence also suggests some people with cancer benefit from Chinese herbs through improved blood counts, less fatigue and fewer side effects from chemotherapy.

"At the start of my chemotherapy I got bad mouth ulcers. My Chinese herbalist changed my herbs from hot to cold so they cooled the body rather than heating it. After that, I didn’t have another mouth ulcer for three years. My chemotherapy dose was also reduced, but I think the Chinese medicine made a difference too."  

*Esther (breast cancer)*
Many people believe herbs are safe because they are natural. This is not always the case. Taking the wrong dose, the wrong combination or using the wrong part of the plant can sometimes cause side effects. Herbs can also interact with chemotherapy, radiotherapy, biological therapy or hormonal therapy. Ask your treatment team which herbs and supplements are suitable to take during cancer treatment.

**St. John’s wort** – This popular herb for depression may stop some chemotherapy drugs and other medication from working properly. It may also increase skin reactions to radiotherapy.

**Black cohosh** – Herbalists often prescribe this to help women with the symptoms of early menopause. There is some evidence to prove this but more research is needed. Women with oestrogen receptor positive breast cancer should avoid this herb. Black cohosh has been linked to liver problems, although this is rare.

**Ginkgo biloba and garlic** – Studies have shown that these may have a blood-thinning effect, which can cause bleeding. This could be harmful for people with low platelet levels (e.g. from chemotherapy) or who are having surgery.

**Green tea** – This may make cancer drug bortezomib (Velcade®) less effective. It may increase the side effects of the hormonal therapy tamoxifen and some chemotherapy drugs.

Keep your complementary health practitioners and doctors informed about any herbal remedies you use before, during or after cancer treatment. Knowing about all the medicines you’re taking will help them give you the best possible care.
One of the most common things that people with cancer who try complementary therapies do is make nutritional changes. Some people want to make changes to their diet to help their body cope with the effects of cancer and its treatments, and to give themselves the best chance of recovery.

Many therapies incorporate general dietary advice while some, such as traditional Chinese medicine and ayurvedic medicine, have their own specific approaches to diet. Most doctors and cancer nurses recommend eating a balanced diet. Your doctor, nurse or dietitian can give you advice on healthy eating. You can also call Cancer Council Helpline for free information on eating well during and after treatment.

**Benefits:** Vegetables and fruit contain vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals, which are natural substances such as antioxidants that may destroy cancer-causing agents (carcinogens). Cancer Council recommends the Australian Dietary general community guidelines of two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables daily for cancer survivors. Fruit and vegetables are best eaten fresh and whole rather than as a supplement, and consumption of a variety of both cooked and raw vegetables is recommended.

There is no evidence to show that anti-cancer diets such as the Gerson diet or a macrobiotic diet can prevent, treat or control any type of cancer. High-dose supplements of vitamins and minerals have shown no benefits in research studies.
Naturopathic nutrition

**What it is:** Naturopathic nutrition is about what you eat and how it affects your health and wellbeing. It promotes the use of whole foods, organic foods and certain food types for different people.

**Why use it:** For your body to function efficiently, you need to eat a balanced diet of fats, proteins and carbohydrates. You also need vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other nutrients found in fresh food. If you are deficient in certain nutrients, you may experience worse side effects from cancer treatment, experience new symptoms and need a longer recovery time.

**What to expect:** A naturopathic nutritionist develops a treatment plan, which is focused on creating diets from nutrient-rich food rather than medicinal or bodywork. Sometimes supplements are also recommended.

**Evidence:** There is some clinical evidence that a healthy diet can help people recover from cancer treatment. There is no strong evidence that organic food is better than conventionally-grown food for improving health.

During treatment I had terrible digestive problems and urinary tract infections. My naturopath prescribed a range of soothing herbs and I drank cranberry juice and aloe vera juice. I also cut out all fried and processed foods. Within a few weeks the problems had cleared up.  

*Caroline (breast cancer)*
Differences between dietitians and nutritionists

**Nutritionists** – The term nutritionist refers to both qualified nutrition scientists and naturopathic nutritionists. Some dietitians also call themselves nutritionists.

Nutritionists working in the natural health industry should have at least a diploma of nutrition, or equivalent, from a university or naturopathic college. Those working within a naturopathic framework are usually employed in private practice or in a holistic medical or complementary therapies centre. Practitioners will approach dietary issues differently according to their level of training and qualifications.

For cancer patients, a dietitian works out specialised diets, helps with weight issues, and makes sure you are adequately nourished if you have eating difficulties. You may be given supplements if you are unable to meet your nutritional requirements through diet alone.

You might see a dietitian when you go to hospital, or privately after your treatment.

**Dietitians** – To become accredited, dietitians need university qualifications in science, nutrition and dietetics. They modify diets based on scientific evidence to help treat disease symptoms and to get the most out of food without the unnecessary use of supplements. They often work within a conventional medical framework in hospitals, aged care facilities and medical practices.

If your GP refers you to a dietitian as part of a Chronic Disease Management plan, you may be eligible for a Medicare rebate.
Homoeopathic and flower essence remedies are not the same, but they are made in a similar way. The main (active) ingredient is diluted over and over again so the final remedy no longer contains any of the original ingredient.

As there are no measurable active ingredients left in the remedies, scientists are unsure how these remedies affect the body. However, because there aren’t active ingredients in the remedies, this means they are generally considered safe to use with conventional treatments, as they do not appear to interact with drugs.

**Benefits:** Homoeopathy and flower essences are said to work by balancing the mind and body, and by addressing emotional or spiritual needs. This positively affects the internal (biochemical) functioning of the body. These therapies are used to treat symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, irritability or depression, as well as common ailments.

**Side effects:** Homoeopathic and flower remedies do not tend to cause side effects because they are extremely diluted. However, if you feel you have experienced a reaction because of them, you should stop taking the remedy and contact your practitioner and/or doctor for advice.

Although homoeopathy and flower essences are usually taken internally, sometimes they are called energy therapies, vibrational therapies or mind-body therapies.
Homoeopathy

**What it is:** It is based on the idea that ‘like cures like’. That is, you are given a substance that causes similar symptoms in a healthy body as the symptoms you are experiencing. This is said to stimulate energy in the body that relieves the symptoms of ill health. Homoeopathic remedies are made from plant, mineral and animal substances. They are diluted in water and this is used to make the remedy.

**Why use it:** Homoeopathy is a gentle way to restore vitality and reduce emotional imbalances in the body.

**What to expect:** A homoeopath takes a case history that considers not only your medical history, but also the kind of person you are and how you respond physically and emotionally to your symptoms. A remedy is chosen and prescribed as liquid drops or tablets, which are taken throughout the day. You may also be given a cream for your skin, if appropriate.

**Evidence:** Anecdotal evidence shows that homoeopathy may help improve the physical and emotional wellbeing of people with cancer. However, scientific studies have shown mixed results. Some small studies suggest homoeopathy may help ease menopausal symptoms of women with breast cancer. One study showed it may reduce the heat sensation caused by radiotherapy.

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See pages 14–15 for regulatory information on medicines, including flower remedies and homoeopathy.
Flower remedies

What it is: Also known as flower essences, these are highly diluted extracts from the flowers of wild plants. There are many types of flower remedies from around the world. The most well-known in Australia are the original Bach Flower Remedies®, developed in the 1930s in England, and the Australian Bush Flower Essences®, developed in Australia in the 1980s.

Why use it: They are used to balance the mind, body and spirit so you are more able to cope with emotional problems, which sometimes can contribute to poor health.

What to expect: Much like a counselling session, the therapist will ask questions and listen to you talk about yourself, the problems you are experiencing and how you feel about or approach certain situations. This enables the therapist to prepare a remedy – usually a blend of essences – tailored specifically for you, which is taken in water several times a day.

Evidence: Scientific evidence does not support the use of flower remedies for treating diseases, however, anecdotal evidence suggests they are helpful for reducing fear, anxiety or depression.

After surgery I was so fearful that the cancer would return. My naturopath gave me Bach flower remedies for fear, shock and exhaustion. These helped me relax and I became more realistic about my situation. Louise (bowel cancer)
Catherine’s story

Just before Christmas in 2007, I felt some pain in my breast and noticed changes to my nipple, so I saw my GP. I hardly ever go to the doctor's because I’m a naturopath and don’t get sick very often.

I had a core biopsy, which showed a malignancy, so I was scheduled in for a lumpectomy in January. It was really hard waiting for test results and the surgery, but I had to, because everything had shut down over the holiday period.

While I was waiting, I took herbal and nutritional remedies for my general wellbeing. I had always had a very good diet and lifestyle, but after I was diagnosed, I took herbs that would help strengthen and support my body to deal with different aspects of surgery, such as recovering from the anaesthetic and helping my tissue heal.

After the operation, I didn’t feel pain but I was really nauseous, so I took a homoeopathic remedy to quell this.

 Luckily the cancer hadn’t spread to my lymph nodes, but the surgeon hadn’t got a clear margin, so I had to have a mastectomy in February. I had lots of pain after surgery, so I took homoeopathic remedies in the hospital for pain relief and bruising. I also had herbs for healing the scar tissue.

Although I was given the all clear with the pathology results, I was offered further treatments, but I decided to wait to see how my body recovered.

For me, becoming informed about the cancer and the different treatments, taking control of the situation by being able to choose what treatments I did and did not want, and keeping positive were really important for my recovery.
Making treatment decisions

Sometimes it is difficult to decide on the right treatment. You may feel that everything is happening so fast you don't have time to think things through. Usually, however, there is time to consider the different treatment options. Deciding whether or not to use complementary therapies is not usually the first decision that needs to be made.

Some people will consider complementary therapies at the time of their diagnosis; others will not think about using them until later, maybe as part of their supportive or palliative care. If you are thinking of using an alternative therapy, it is not recommended you delay or stop using conventional treatment in favour of it.

Deciding whether to use complementary therapies and which ones is a similar process to deciding what course of conventional treatment you are going to take.

You need to make sure you understand enough about your disease, all the treatment options and potential side effects to make your own decisions. You always have the right to find out what a suggested treatment means for you, and the right to accept or refuse it, whether it is a conventional, complementary or alternative treatment.

It is advisable to see complementary therapists who are willing to communicate with your doctors and consider the conventional treatments you are having.
Decision-making steps

Weigh up the different types of treatments

• Think about what you expect to gain from using complementary therapies.
• Consider the possible side effects and how these might affect you or the way your conventional treatments work.
• Consider whether you prefer to use therapies with strong scientific evidence, or whether anecdotal evidence is acceptable to you.
• Think about the costs of treatments – see page 66 for more information.

Find out more about different therapies

• Speak to your doctor and complementary therapists.
• Discuss the issue with your family and friends.
• Talk to other people who have tried these treatments, for example, at a support group or through Cancer Connections (see page 29).
• Borrow books on the topic from the library or read about therapies on recommended internet sites (see page 72).
• Contact a natural therapy association for more information, to find practitioners in your area or to verify their qualifications and experience (see pages 70–71).
• Call Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 to discuss.

Discuss your concerns

• Talk to your therapist or doctor about the complementary therapies you would like to try, and if there are any interactions or side effects with your cancer treatment.
• Seek a second opinion if you are not happy with the information you are given.
Can I help myself or should I see a professional?

One of the reasons people with cancer use complementary therapies is because they can take an active role in their health.

Some ways people can help themselves, without the guidance of a professional, include learning some gentle massage or acupressure techniques, adding essential oils to their bath, doing meditation, or drinking some herbal tea.

Be careful about buying complementary therapies online. Many internet sites offer a range of treatments, usually at very cheap prices. However, the safety and quality regulations that apply to commercial products sold in Australia do not cover products purchased from overseas. See page 14–15 for more information.

Some people may consider self-prescribing some herbs or nutritional supplements. Although self-prescribing may seem cheaper, it may not give you the best and safest results or be as effective as it could be. Benefits of seeing a professional complementary therapist are that they:

- have an objective view of your case
- should have had experience treating a range of conditions and may have treated other people with cancer
- should be willing to liaise with your clinicians, if necessary
- can prepare a tailor-made treatment plan and dispense remedies based on your individual needs, if qualified to do so
- can help you avoid health risks of using complementary therapies while receiving conventional cancer treatment.
Finding a complementary therapist

Contacting an association is a good starting point for finding a therapist. See pages 70–71 for a list of associations in Australia. Many people find good therapists through recommendations from family or friends or through a support group. Some registered health professionals (e.g. doctors and nurses) are also qualified in a complementary therapy such as nutritional and herbal medicine, hypnotherapy, counselling, acupuncture or massage.

- Ask if the therapist is experienced or comfortable working with a person who has cancer.
- Confirm the therapist – particularly a herbalist or naturopath – is willing to communicate with your doctors about your treatment.
- Check whether the therapist would like to see your test results, a list of your medications or your conventional treatment plan. This information reduces the risk of them dispensing remedies or other treatments that might interact with your conventional medicines or treatments.
- Ask for a written treatment plan outlining the remedies and dietary or lifestyle adjustments recommended.
- Keep a record of your consultations, including the treatments given and medicines or supplements you have been prescribed.
- Write down any questions you have or see the question checklist on pages 73–76.
- Take a family member or friend with you to appointments, to offer support, take part in the discussions, take notes or simply listen.
- See the glossary if you do not understand a word.
Keeping your health care providers in the loop

It is important you let your primary health care providers (e.g. GP, nurses, specialists) know you are considering using complementary therapies. This will help reduce the risk of adverse reactions. Studies show the most common reason people may not discuss their use of complementary therapies with their primary health care providers is fear of their disapproval.

The use of complementary therapies is growing, so many primary health care providers are better informed about them and are often supportive of their use. Some doctors and nurses have also been trained in complementary therapies and are able to give you information about them.

However, some doctors and nurses may not support your use of complementary therapies. It is still important to discuss the topic with them, as it allows them to consider your safety and wellbeing.

For example, your surgeon, oncologist or radiotherapist may have specific concerns, such as not using certain creams or medicines, or not having acupuncture in a particular place on the body. If you are taking herbs or nutritional supplements, they may suggest you stop taking these before, during or after radiotherapy or chemotherapy treatments. To keep your doctors and nurses informed, your complementary therapists could provide a letter outlining the type of therapy you are receiving.

It is your right to choose your treatment, whether it is conventional or complementary, however, it is important to keep your primary health care providers in the loop.
**Talking with others**
You may want to discuss your different treatment options with family or friends, medical practitioners, nursing staff, the hospital social worker or chaplain, your own religious or spiritual adviser, a cancer support group or Cancer Council Helpline. Talking it over can help sort out the right course of action for you.

**A second opinion**
Just as you may want to get a second opinion from another specialist about your conventional cancer treatment, you might want to see a few different complementary therapists to compare how they would approach your treatment. After consulting with a complementary therapist, you may decide you don't want to continue seeing them because you are not sure they can offer you the right supportive treatment for your individual case.

Getting a second opinion can be a valuable part of your overall decision-making process and can help you feel comfortable about the treatment – if any – you choose to have.

“I went to a naturopath I’d seen before I had cancer. He strongly recommended that I didn’t go on tamoxifen due to its side effects. I found this too confronting, as I had already decided to go with the Western medicine approach. As I still wanted to support my recovery with complementary therapies, I went to another naturopath.”  

*Julie (breast cancer)*
Costs
Consultation costs vary, depending on the training and experience of the therapist, the length of a consultation, and the location of the practice. The standard fee for a private practitioner is around $80 to $140 per hour, which does not include the cost of remedies.

Naturopaths, herbalists and homoeopaths may dispense their own remedies or sell you nutritional supplements. Prices vary depending on the type of remedy, the ingredients, strength and quantity. Consider speaking to a few practitioners or ask in a health food shop to compare costs of consultations and medicines.

If you have private health insurance, check if you are eligible for a rebate on the cost of consultations with a complementary therapist – some funds may not cover some complementary therapies. Also ask your practitioner if their services are covered as they will need to meet certain criteria set by your health fund. Most funds do not provide a rebate on the cost of medicines. You cannot claim complementary therapies under Medicare.

Taking part in a clinical trial or research
In the past, funding for clinical trials or research into the effectiveness and safety of complementary therapies has been limited. Because of the growing popularity of complementary therapies in Australia, the National Institute of Complementary Medicine has been established to promote research in this area of health care.
Some universities and hospitals are also involved in clinical trials and research. There may be opportunities through your hospital or support group for you to take part in clinical trials and research involving the use of complementary therapies.

Before deciding whether or not to join a trial, you may wish to consider and discuss the following questions with your doctor:

- What treatments are being tested and why?
- What tests are involved?
- Can I be in the trial while still having conventional treatment?
- What are the possible risks or side effects?
- What are the possible benefits?
- How long will the trial last?
- What will I do if problems occur while I am in the trial?
- Has an independent ethics committee approved the trial?

If you join a clinical trial for a conventional cancer treatment, it is important to check whether using complementary therapies could impact on the trial results. If you want to participate in the trial, but your use of complementary therapies would make you ineligible, discuss the pros and cons with your doctor and/or complementary therapist.

For free information about clinical trials and other research, call Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20. You can also find trials on the website www.australiancancertrials.gov.au.
Seeking support

Life after treatment

Life after cancer treatment can present its own challenges. Complementary therapies may improve your general wellbeing and help you cope better with life after treatment.

You may find it helpful to:

- take time to adjust to physical and emotional changes
- re-establish a new daily routine at your own pace
- spend time on a leisure activity you enjoy
- maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle
- schedule regular check-ups with your doctor
- share your concerns with family and friends and tell them how they can support you
- call Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 to connect with other people who have had cancer, or to request a free booklet about life after cancer.

If you have continued feelings of sadness, have trouble getting up in the morning or have lost motivation for things that previously gave you pleasure, you may be experiencing depression. This is quite common among people who have had cancer.

Talk to your GP, as counselling or medication – even for a short time – may help. Some people are able to get a Medicare rebate for sessions with a psychologist. Ask your GP if you are eligible. Your local Cancer Council may also run a counselling program. The organisation beyondblue has information about coping with depression and anxiety. Go to www.beyondblue.org.au or call 1300 224 636 to order a fact sheet.
You may be reading this booklet because you are caring for someone with cancer. Being a carer can be stressful and cause you anxiety. Try to look after yourself – give yourself some time out and share your worries and concerns with somebody neutral such as a counsellor or your doctor.

Many cancer support groups and cancer education programs are open to carers, as well as people with cancer. Support groups and some types of programs can offer valuable opportunities to share experiences and ways of coping.

Support services such as Home Help, Meals on Wheels or visiting nurses can help you in your caring role. There are also many groups and organisations that can provide you with information and support, such as Carers Australia, the national body representing carers in Australia. Carers Australia works with the Carers Associations in each of the states and territories. Phone 1800 242 636 or visit www.carersaustralia.com.au for more information, counselling and resources.

You can also call Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 to find out more about different services and to request free information for carers and families looking after someone with cancer.
Professional associations

The following associations represent practitioners across a range of complementary therapies in Australia. Contact them to find out more about the different therapies and to locate a practitioner.

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<tr>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of Massage Therapists</td>
<td>02 9517 9925</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.amt.org.au">www.amt.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australasian Integrative Medicine Association</td>
<td>03 8199 0904</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.aima.net.au">www.aima.net.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association</td>
<td>1300 725 334</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.acupuncture.org.au">www.acupuncture.org.au</a></td>
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<td>Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association</td>
<td><a href="http://www.anzata.org">www.anzata.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Association of Massage Therapists</td>
<td>1300 138 872</td>
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<td><a href="http://aamt.com.au">http://aamt.com.au</a></td>
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<td>Australian Feldenkrais Guild</td>
<td>1800 001 550</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.feldenkrais.org.au">www.feldenkrais.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Homoeopathic Association</td>
<td>07 4636 5081</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.homeopathyoz.org">www.homeopathyoz.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Hypnotherapists’ Association</td>
<td>1800 067 557</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.ahahypnotherapy.org.au">www.ahahypnotherapy.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Music Therapy Association</td>
<td>03 9525 9625</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.austmta.org.au">www.austmta.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Natural Therapists Association</td>
<td>1800 817 577</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au">www.australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association</td>
<td>1800 422 885</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.anpa.asn.au">www.anpa.asn.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique</td>
<td>1300 788 540</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.austat.org.au">www.austat.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Traditional Medicine Society</td>
<td>02 8878 1500</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.atms.com.au">www.atms.com.au</a></td>
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<td>Bowen Therapists Federation of Australia</td>
<td>1300 426 936</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.bowen.asn.au">www.bowen.asn.au</a></td>
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<td>Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia</td>
<td>03 9486 3077</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.pacfa.org.au">www.pacfa.org.au</a></td>
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<td>Dietitians Association of Australia</td>
<td>1800 812 942</td>
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<td><a href="http://daa.asn.au">http://daa.asn.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>International Aromatherapy and Aromatic Medicine Association</td>
<td>02 9715 6622</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.iaama.org.au">www.iaama.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise and Sports Science Australia</td>
<td>07 3862 4122</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.essa.org.au">www.essa.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Herbalists Association of Australia</td>
<td>02 8765 0071</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.nhaa.org.au">www.nhaa.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflexology Association of Australia</td>
<td>1300 733 711</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.reflexology.org.au">www.reflexology.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reiki Australia</td>
<td>1300 664 780</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.reikiaustralia.com.au">www.reikiaustralia.com.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shiatsu Therapy Association of Australia</td>
<td>1300 138 250</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.staa.org.au">www.staa.org.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yoga Australia</td>
<td>1300 881 451</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.yogaustralia.org.au">www.yogaustralia.org.au</a></td>
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Useful websites

The internet has many useful resources, although not all websites are reliable. The websites listed below are good sources of reliable information. Search for complementary therapies on these websites.

**Australian**

Cancer Council Australia ........................................ www.cancer.org.au
Australasian Integrative Medicine Association ...................................... www.aima.net.au
Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency .................................. www.ahpra.gov.au
Cancer Connections ........................................ www.cancerconnections.com.au
Carers Australia ........................................ www.carersaustralia.com.au
Department of Health and Ageing ........................................ www.health.gov.au
Health Insite ................................................... www.healthinsite.gov.au
The National Institute of Complementary Medicine ................................ www.nicm.edu.au
Therapeutic Goods Administration ........................................ www.tga.gov.au

**International**

American Cancer Society ........................................ www.cancer.org
Macmillan Cancer Support ........................................ www.macmillan.org.uk
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center ................................ www.mskcc.org
BC Cancer Agency .............................................. www.bccancer.bc.ca
Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database ..................................... www.naturaldatabase.com
US National Cancer Institute ........................................ www.cancer.gov
Question checklist

You may find this checklist helpful when thinking about the questions you want to ask your complementary therapist. To download the full list visit www.cancerinstitute.org.au.

Things to consider before using complementary therapies

• What are the benefits?
• What is the scientific evidence to support its use?
• Will the therapy directly harm me because of:
  – its side effects?
  – possible interaction with other medication?
  – being told by the therapist to stop or delay all conventional treatment?
• Can I afford the cost of the therapies or medicines?

General questions to ask any potential complementary therapist

• What are your qualifications? Are you a member of a professional association?
• What training or experience do you have in treating people with cancer? Have you treated anyone with my type of cancer?
• What exactly is the therapy and how does it work?
• How long will it take to work?
• How can the therapies you practise help me?
• Are there any specific precautions you would take for me?
• Has the therapy been tested in clinical trials?
• Have the findings been published and are they available to read?
• Can these therapies be combined with conventional treatment?
• Do you expect me to stop using my usual medication?
Are you willing to work with my doctors or other health professionals I may need to see?

- How long should I use this therapy and how will I know if it’s working?
- Are you able to do home visits if I am not well enough to attend your clinic?
- How long are your consultations?
- What do you charge for a consultation?
- What can I expect from a consultation?
- How many consultations do you recommend, and how often?
- Do you dispense your own medicine and supplements?
- How much can I expect to pay for medicines?
- Have the products or medicines you dispense been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration?

**General questions to ask your doctor**
- Are you familiar with complementary therapies or medicines?
- Do you have any qualifications in complementary therapies?
- Are there any complementary therapies you think might help me?
- Would you be happy for me to use complementary therapies? If not, what should I do if I decide to use complementary therapies?
- Would you be willing to guide me in my research or choice of complementary therapies?
• Would you be willing to talk to my complementary therapists?
• Can you recommend any complementary therapists?
• Do you know whether the complementary medicines I am taking or wish to take will interfere with any of my treatments?

Questions about specific therapies
Mind-body techniques
• What type of therapist would you recommend for my issues?
• Can you refer me to a psychologist or a counsellor?

Body-based practices
• Are there any forms of massage or bodywork that would help me?
• Are there any forms of massage or bodywork I shouldn’t have?
• Can I have acupuncture before and/or after surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy?
• Are there any areas on my body where a massage therapist or acupuncturist needs to take special care? Can the area be touched or should it be avoided altogether?
• What precautions, if any, should I take?
• Would I be able to participate in tai chi, qi gong or yoga?
• What level of exercise intensity would be suitable for me?

Can you provide me with a letter giving your approval for me to have massage or other bodywork therapy?
Biological-based therapies

Nutritional therapies
• Are there any dietary changes I should make for my general wellbeing?
• Should I eat organic foods?
• Are there any vitamin or mineral supplements that will help specific side effects caused by conventional treatment?
• Should I be taking a multivitamin?
• What can I eat to improve my digestion and bowel movements?
• Are there any foods or supplements that I should definitely have or definitely avoid during and after cancer treatment?
• Should I see a dietitian or a nutritionist?

Herbal medicine
• Are there any herbs you would recommend during or after cancer treatment?
• Are there any herbs I shouldn’t take because of my medication, surgery or other conventional treatments?
• If I use herbal medicine, when should I take it in relation to my other medication or conventional treatments? Is it okay to use it at the same time or should I take it at a different time? What dosage? Do they have side effects?
• Can I use a herbal cream to help with redness from radiation?

Other therapies

Flower remedies and homoeopathy
• Do you think flower remedies or homoeopathy would benefit me?
• Will I have any side effects from these remedies?
You may come across new terms when reading this booklet or talking to health professionals. You can check the meaning of other health-related words at www.cancercouncil.com.au/words or www.cancervic.org.au/glossary.

**active exercise techniques**  
Exercise techniques that require active participation to achieve the benefits.

**active ingredient**  
The compound in a medicine that works on the body.

**acupressure**  
An ancient technique that is similar to acupuncture. It involves applying pressure on specific points on the body to unblock energy.

**acupuncture**  
A form of traditional Chinese medicine in which fine, sterile needles are inserted into points along the energy channels in the body to reduce symptoms of ill health.

**Alexander technique**  
A method of realigning posture.

**alternative therapies**  
Therapies used in place of conventional treatment.

**anecdotal evidence**  
Evidence based on personal experience that has not been scientifically tested.

**aromatherapy**  
The use of essential oils extracted from plants to improve mood, physical symptoms and general wellbeing.

**art therapy**  
The use of art (painting, drawing, sculpture, digital art) to help people express their feelings.

**ayurvedic medicine**  
Traditional Indian system of medicine based on balancing the different organs and systems in the body using herbal medicine, diet, massage, yoga and meditation.

**base oil**  
An oil used in massage or aromatherapy that allows the
massage therapist to work over the skin easily. Base oils can be applied directly to the skin. Also known as carrier oil.

**biochemical function**
The way the body works internally. There are thousands of reactions occurring every day in cells and organs to keep people alive and functioning. Medicines, including drugs, herbs and dietary supplements, affect internal functioning, just as food does.

**biological-based therapies**
Therapies that include herbal remedies, vitamins and other dietary supplements that are taken internally and affect the biochemical functioning of the body.

**blood counts**
A test that counts the number of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in the body.

**body-based practices (bodywork)**
A range of different therapies that involve touching the body or the energy field surrounding the body.

**botanical medicine**
See herbal medicine.

**Bowen therapy**
A non-invasive bodywork technique involving light hand movements over the body to release tension.

**carbohydrate**
The part of food made of sugars and starches. A source of energy (kilojoules/calories) for the body.

**chemotherapy**
The use of cytotoxic drugs to treat cancer by killing cancer cells or slowing their growth.

**Chinese herbal medicine**
The use of herbs originating from Asia to help strengthen vitality, overcome illness and improve patient outcomes.

**chiropractic**
A system of manipulation for joint and muscular problems.

**clinical trial**
A research study that tests new and improved treatments.

**coffee enema**
An alternative therapy that
involves inserting coffee into the anus to open the bowels, cleanse the colon and remove toxins from the body.

**complementary therapies**
Treatments used in conjunction with conventional treatment, which improve general health, wellbeing and quality of life, and help people cope with side effects of cancer.

**conventional cancer treatment**
Scientifically proven treatments for cancer, including surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy and pharmaceutical medications.

**counselling**
Helping someone discuss and resolve difficult issues by listening to them.

**dietary supplement**
Nourishment given to increase the nutritional intake of kilojoules/calories (energy), vitamins and minerals.

**dietitian**
A health professional specialising in dietetics and human nutrition.

**energy fields and meridians**
Vital force or life force that runs within and outside of the body. Energy is believed to surround the body in an energy field, as well as running along invisible meridians inside the body.

**energy (kilojoules or calories)**
Energy is counted in kilojoules or calories and provides fuel for our daily activities. Energy is obtained from food and drink.

**energy therapies**
Therapies based on the concept of energy or vital force surrounding or running through the body.

**essential oil**
Aromatic oil extracted from different plant parts, such as seeds, bark, flowers and leaves.

**evidence-based**
Treatments that have been tested scientifically and shown to be beneficial over and over again.
Feldenkrais
A system of gentle movements that encourage self-awareness to improve movement and posture.

flower remedies
Natural medicines extracted from flowers and diluted several times so that no active ingredient remains. Also known as flower essences.

Gerson therapy
An alternative nutritional therapy based on pure fruit and vegetable juices and unprocessed foods to detoxify the body.

guided imagery
A type of meditation in which a person is led through imagining a series of scenes that promote healing thoughts to achieve peace, pain relief and relaxation.

healing touch
The use of soft touch to restore harmony and balance by working with the flow of energy in the body.

herb
A part of a plant, such as leaves, flowers, roots or berries, which is used for medicinal or cooking purposes.

herbal medicine
The use of herbs taken by mouth or applied to the body to treat and prevent illness, and to strengthen the body. There are different types of herbal medicine; the main types used in Australia originated in Europe and Asia. Also known as botanical medicine.

holistic health care
Health care that assesses the causes and effects of disease, and the way the different systems of the body impact on each other. It addresses illness with holistic treatments that benefit people’s emotional, structural and internal health.

homoeopathy
A system of health care based on the idea of treating ‘like with like’. Remedies stimulate an ill person’s inner strength and direct energy in the body to where it is needed most for healing.
hormone treatment
A treatment that blocks the body’s natural hormones, which can help cancer grow.

hypnotherapy
A type of counselling where a practitioner induces a deep relaxation so a patient’s subconscious (inner) mind can communicate its thoughts with their conscious (aware) mind to overcome mental, physical and emotional problems.

immunotherapy
The prevention or treatment of disease using substances that alter the immune system’s response.

Indigenous medicine
In Australia, remedies and ways of healing used traditionally by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

infusion
A herbal remedy made up by steeping dried herbs in hot or boiling water. Also known as herbal tea.

ingestive therapy (ingested remedy)
Therapies taken internally (ingested), such as herbal medicine, nutrition, flower remedies and homoeopathy.

integrative medicine (integrative therapies)
The use of evidence-based complementary therapies and conventional medicine.

interaction
An effect that occurs when two or more substances react with each other.

laetrile
An alternative therapy, laetrile is a substance found in almond and apricot kernels. Also known as amygdalin or vitamin B17.

life coaching
A type of counselling in which a coach collaborates with the client to set goals and work out ways to change one’s life to achieve them.

lifestyle factors
Factors that help give a holistic (well-rounded) picture of your
health and wellbeing. Include what you eat and drink, how much you exercise, your occupation and its risks, relationships, stress and pressures in your life, and whether you smoke.

**liquid extract**
Herbal remedies in which the herb is extracted in concentrated form into a solution of water and alcohol. The extract is further diluted in water when taken.

**lymphatic system**
A network of tissues, capillaries, vessels, ducts and nodes that removes excess fluid from tissues, absorbs fatty acids and transports fats and produces immune cells.

**lymphoedema**
Swelling caused by a build-up of fluid. This happens when lymph vessels or nodes don’t drain properly.

**macrobiotic diet**
A strict diet that works on the principles of balancing yin and yang in the body. It discourages meat and processed foods, while fruit, vegetables and grains should be eaten in season and thoroughly chewed.

**magnet therapy**
An alternative therapy that uses magnets to reduce pain, improve mobility and overcome disease.

**manual lymphatic drainage**
A type of specialised massage designed to stimulate the flow of lymph in tissues.

**massage**
A type of bodywork therapy in which muscles are stimulated, stretched and relaxed through specialised pressure and strokes.

**meditation**
A technique to relax the mind and body by focusing on breathing, learning to still the mind and thinking only about the present.

**melatonin**
A naturally occurring hormone that helps to regulate the body clock. It is also a strong antioxidant.

**meridian**
In traditional Chinese medicine,
the body is believed to have meridians, or energy channels, through which energy flows to keep people balanced and healthy.

**microwave therapy**
An alternative therapy using microwaves to treat cancer.

**mind-body techniques**
Techniques that help people address emotional issues and other problems that have a mental component, such as anxiety, depression, stress and pain.

**minerals**
Components of food essential for the body, such as iron, zinc and calcium.

**mistletoe extract**
An alternative therapy made from the European mistletoe plant to treat cancer.

**music therapy**
The use of music to improve health and wellbeing.

**naturopathic nutrition**
A form of nutrition based on naturopathic principles of healthy eating. Not only are specific foods chosen to create a balanced diet, but emphasis is placed on correcting problems in the digestive system to enhance digestion and absorption of nutrients.

**naturopathy**
A holistic system of health care incorporating diet, bodywork and herbal medicine to stimulate the body’s own healing system.

**needles/press needles**
Fine, sterile needles inserted into the body during acupuncture. Press needles are like studs, which are covered with tape to help them stay in place for several days.

**nutrition**
The process of eating and digesting the food the body needs.

**oncologist**
A doctor who specialises in the study and treatment of cancer.

**osteopathy**
Manipulation of the musculoskeletal system (muscle,
bones and joints) to improve mobility and posture.

**ozone therapy**
An alternative therapy in which oxygen is targeted at cancer cells in the belief they will die in its presence.

**palliative care**
The holistic care of people who have a life-limiting illness, their families and friends. It aims to improve quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, spiritual, social and practical needs.

**palliative treatment**
Medical treatment for people with secondary cancer to help them manage pain and other physical and emotional symptoms of cancer.

**passive bodywork techniques**
Body-based therapies such as massage and reflexology where the therapist applies manual pressure to the client’s body or works on the energy fields of the client.

**Pilates**
A system of exercises that increase awareness of muscles in the body to improve breathing, core strength and posture.

**polarity therapy**
A gentle bodywork technique using touch to clear blockages in energy flow around the body.

**primary cancer**
The original cancer. Cells from the primary cancer may break away and be carried to other parts of the body, where secondary cancers may form.

**psychological techniques**
Another term for mind-body techniques.

**psychotherapy**
A range of techniques that help people improve their mental health and wellbeing by giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts and consider how their behaviour and feelings impact on their day-to-day life.

**pulse analysis**
A form of diagnosis used in traditional Chinese medicine where
a person’s pulses are felt – usually on the wrists – to determine the imbalances in their body.

**qi**
Pronounced ‘chee’, this is another term for energy or vital force.

**qi gong**
Pronounced ‘chee goong’, this is a form of movement therapy from traditional Chinese medicine.

**radiotherapy**
The use of radiation, usually x-rays or gamma rays, to kill cancer cells or injure them so they cannot grow and multiply.

**reflexology**
A type of bodywork involving the massage of nerve reflex points on the feet.

**reiki**
A system of light or no-touch movements that may turn blocked negative energy into positive energy.

**relaxation (relaxation techniques)**
Any technique that encourages relaxation to reduce stress and the physical problems it causes.

**scientific evidence**
Rigorous testing to prove something works or does not work. Clinical trials are a form of scientific evidence.

**shark cartilage**
An alternative therapy based on the belief that it stops angiogenesis (the growth of new blood vessels).

**shiatsu**
A type of bodywork in which the pressure points are massaged lightly with the fingers, thumbs, elbows, knees, hands and feet to restore vitality.

**side effect**
Unintended effects of a drug, herb or other treatment.

**spirituality**
Connection with a higher being or one’s inner self, which often brings comfort and understanding about the world, one’s place in it and the reasons behind life’s challenges.
**supportive care**
Care that extends beyond treating the actual cancer. It covers wider issues that occur due to cancer and includes counselling, practical assistance, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and spiritual care.

**tai chi**
Part of traditional Chinese medicine, this active exercise technique incorporates coordinated body movement, breathing techniques and meditation to create stability in the body.

**therapeutic touch**
A bodywork technique where soothing touch by the practitioner calms the body through restoration of the flow of energy.

**tongue analysis**
A diagnostic technique used in traditional Chinese medicine in which the tongue’s colour, shape, coating and texture are examined to find out about the state of a person’s health.

**traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)**
A broad system of holistic health care originating in Asia, which includes treatments such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, qi gong and tai chi.

**traditional medicine (traditional therapies)**
A term used by complementary therapists to mean old systems of medicine that are passed down through the ages. Medical practitioners may use the term to mean mainstream (orthodox or regular) medicine that is practised in hospitals today.

**vaporiser (oil burner)**
A vessel in which essential oils are placed above a flame or other heat source to release the aroma.

**visualisation**
Another term for guided imagery.

**vital force (vital energy)**
The life force within the body that contributes to people’s health and wellbeing. It is stimulated by nourishing foods or medicines,
mind-body techniques and the use of touch therapies.

**vitamins**
Essential substances found in food, which the body needs to burn energy, repair tissue, assist metabolism and fight infection.

**Western herbal medicine**
The use of herbs – mainly from Europe – to correct imbalances in the body and bring it back into a state of health. Herbalists prepare individual blends of herbs that address a range symptoms.

**yin and yang**
An ancient Asian concept of balance used in traditional Chinese medicine. It is believed that everything is made up of opposites that complement each other. Yin represents coolness, gentleness and darkness; yang represents heat, strength and light.

**yoga**
An active exercise technique originating from India that focuses on breathing, stretching, strengthening and relaxation.

There are many different types.

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How you can help

At Cancer Council we’re dedicated to improving cancer control. As well as funding millions of dollars in cancer research every year, we advocate for the highest quality care for cancer patients and their families. We create cancer-smart communities by educating people about cancer, its prevention and early detection. We offer a range of practical and support services for people and families affected by cancer. All these programs would not be possible without community support, great and small.

**Join a Cancer Council event:** Join one of our community fundraising events such as Daffodil Day, Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea, Relay For Life, Girls Night In and Pink Ribbon Day, or hold your own fundraiser or become a volunteer.

**Make a donation:** Any gift, large or small, makes a meaningful contribution to our work in supporting people with cancer and their families now and in the future.

**Buy Cancer Council sun protection products:** Every purchase helps you prevent cancer and contribute financially to our goals.

**Help us speak out for a cancer-smart community:** We are a leading advocate for cancer prevention and improved patient services. You can help us speak out on important cancer issues and help us improve cancer awareness by living and promoting a cancer-smart lifestyle.

**Join a research study:** Cancer Council funds and carries out research investigating the causes, management, outcomes and impacts of different cancers. You may be able to join a study.

To find out more about how you, your family and friends can help, please call your local Cancer Council.
Cancer Council Helpline is a telephone information service provided by Cancer Council Queensland for people affected by cancer.

For the cost of a local call (except from mobiles), you, your family, carers or friends can talk about any concerns and needs confidentially with oncology health professionals. Helpline nurses can send you written information and put you in touch with appropriate services in your area. If you need information in a language other than English, there is a telephone interpreting service available for you.

You can call Cancer Council Helpline, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

If you have difficulty communicating over the phone, contact the National Relay Service (www.relayservice.com.au), a Government initiative to assist people who are hearing and/or speech impaired. This service will help you to communicate with a Cancer Council Helpline nurse.

If calling outside business hours, you can leave a message and your call will be returned the next business day.
For support and information on cancer and cancer-related issues, call Cancer Council Helpline. This is a confidential service.

For further information and details please visit our website: www.cancerqld.org.au