Natural Therapies to Support Conventional Cancer Treatment

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Introduction

Conventional cancer treatment involves either removing the cancer from the body (i.e., surgery) or eliminating the cancer cells and shrinking tumors through various methods (i.e., chemotherapy and radiation). In many cases, all these (and possibly other) strategies are employed to help stop the proliferation and spread of rapidly dividing cancer cells. The kind of therapy used to treat cancer depends on many factors, including the location and grade of the tumor(s), the stage of the disease and the general health status of the person receiving the therapy.

According to a 2008 study published in the journal Current Oncology, there has been a shift toward complementary alternative cancer treatments in recent years - a reflection of many personal factors among cancer patients, including the perceived severity of conventional therapy side effects, the desire for greater control over treatment decisions and increasingly favorable attitudes toward holistic therapies.

A middle path (i.e., a combination of conventional and complementary alternative approaches) may be optimal for many. Natural therapies may be most helpful in supporting conventional cancer treatments. Natural therapies may help boost immune function and minimize the severity of side effects caused by surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. In this edition of the Wellness Express, we will take a look at several natural therapies that may be helpful in supporting conventional cancer treatment.

Herbal Supplements

Certain herbal supplements may help cancer patients manage treatment side effects and symptoms, such as nausea and vomiting, pain, fatigue and insomnia. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), recent studies indicate that the herb ginger may be useful in controlling chemotherapy-related nausea when used in combination with anti-nausea medication. Another study, published in 2007, states that Chinese medicinal herbs, when used together with chemotherapy, may improve bone marrow and quality of life in breast cancer patients. A further study published in 2005, notes that decoctions of Huangqi

QUESTION:
What spice may be helpful in controlling nausea?
A) Nutmeg
B) Cinnamon
C) Ginger

ANSWER:
C) Ginger

TRUE OR FALSE:
Yoga may help reduce fatigue in breast cancer patients and survivors

ANSWER:
True

QUESTION:
What natural remedies may be used to support conventional cancer treatments
A) Herbal supplements
B) Chiropractic care
C) Massage
D) All of the above

ANSWER:
D) all of the above
Astragalus) may stimulate immuno-
competent cells and reduce side effects
in cancer patients undergoing chemo-
therapy.\textsuperscript{4}

**Yoga**

Preliminary evidence, notes the
NCCAM, suggests that yoga may be
helpful in treating anxiety, depression,
distress and stress in cancer patients,
and that it may also help reduce fatigue
in breast cancer patients and survivors.
An increasing number of research
studies have examined the potential
benefits of yoga in breast cancer
patients and survivors. A 2009 study
published in the journal *Integrative
Cancer Therapies* states that yoga may
help in managing self-reported psy-
chological distress and favorably alter
circadian patterns of stress hormones in
early breast cancer patients undergoing
radiation therapy.\textsuperscript{5} According to a
2006 study published in the journal
*Psycho-Oncology*, yoga may also have
significant potential as a beneficial
physical activity for breast cancer
survivors.\textsuperscript{6}

**Acupuncture**

Acupuncture is emerging as an
extremely beneficial alternative therapy
for treatment-related nausea and
vomiting in cancer patients. A 2008
study published in the journal
*Acupuncture in Medicine* reports that
acupuncture treatment can significantly
reduce nausea in cancer patients
undergoing a period of chemotherapy.\textsuperscript{7}
Acupuncture may also be helpful in
reducing cancer pain and other symp-
toms. According to a 2008 study
published in the journal *Breast Cancer
Research and Treatment*, acupuncture
appears to provide effective relief from
hot flashes in women who undergo
breast cancer surgery and are treated
with Tamoxifen (a prescription drug
used to treat early or advanced breast
cancer).\textsuperscript{8}

**Manual Therapies**

Manual medicine, such as chirprac-
tic and massage therapy, may also be
helpful in addressing cancer treat-
ment-related symptoms, such as pain,
nausea, anxiety and depression. Care
must be taken by the practitioner,
however, to avoid deep pressure and
specific regions of the body (e.g.,
tumor sites or areas of sensitive skin
causd by radiation therapy). A 2005
study published in the journal *Seminars
in Oncology Nursing* states that the
judicious application of chiropractic
care in cancer patients is both an
economical and effective way to
decrease pain and improve overall
patient health.\textsuperscript{9} Likewise, a 2004 study
published in the *Journal of Pain and
Symptom Management* notes that
massage therapy may significantly
improve cancer patients’ symptoms.\textsuperscript{10}

**Conclusion**

If you have been diagnosed with
cancer and wish to incorporate natural
therapies into your treatment, it is
important that all your healthcare
providers are aware of your plans.
The goal is to make sure that everyone
(conventional and alternative
practitioners alike) is working toward
the same positive outcome. To learn
more about the role of chiropractic
care in cancer treatment and
recovery, please ask your
chiropractor for further details.

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