



FACT SHEET



INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE AND COLORECTAL CANCER

CONVENTIONAL MEDICINE	ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE	COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM)	INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE
An approach where doctors, nurses, therapists, pharmacists and other professionals treat a disease using medication, radiation, surgery and/or other treatments. Also called “Western Medicine” or “Mainstream Medicine”	A non-conventional approach to treat a disease or disorder <u>in place of</u> conventional medicine	A non-conventional approach <u>used alongside</u> conventional medicine to treat a disease	A coordinated approach using both conventional and complementary treatments to treat a disease or disorder. Has support of quality, scientific evidence for effectiveness and safety

*For the purposes of this Fact Sheet, we use the same terms as the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health: “complementary health approaches” when discussing anything other than a conventional treatment, and “integrative health” when discussing incorporating complementary approaches into mainstream healthcare.

What are the most common types of complementary health approaches?

The methods listed on the next page can be safely used and may improve side effects, which can increase quality of life tremendously. Remember that all people are different and respond to treatments differently. Before seeking these approaches, talk to your doctor to make sure that it’s safe for you!

How to find a CAM practitioner:

Start by asking your doctor, social worker or member of your care team. Some hospitals have practitioners that work within their system. You can also ask friends and family, or search online.

Before scheduling an appointment, you want to ensure the practitioner...

- a) Is licensed by your state. This ensures they have gone through comprehensive training.
- b) Has worked with cancer patients. Consider asking them how they will modify their treatment for you. You and your practitioner should have a detailed discussion about your diagnosis, current treatment, etc.

Can integrative approaches cure colorectal cancer?

No alternative method has been proven safe or effective by conclusive scientific evidence to treat colorectal cancer. No scientifically-sound studies have been done to prove the efficacy of alternative treatments to cure cancer or lead to cancer remission. In fact, recent studies have suggested that patients who forgo conventional treatment and receive alternative medicine only are more likely to die.



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APPROACH	BENEFIT
Acupuncture: The process of applying thin needles to certain points on the skin to stimulate acupuncture points. Acupuncturists determine the correct acupuncture points for the problem being treated.	reduce pain, fatigue, nausea/vomiting, weight loss, anxiety, depression, insomnia, dry mouth, hot flashes, nerve problems, constipation, diarrhea
Acupressure: Involves stimulating acupuncture points on the body using firm finger pressure.	reduce pain, anxiety, nausea and vomiting
Aromatherapy: The use of essential oils. Smell receptors respond to essential oils by sending chemical messages to the brain, which can affect moods and emotions.	reduce stress and anxiety
Medical Marijuana/Cannabidiol (CBD) Oil: The use of the cannabis plant to ease cancer related side effects.	reduce pain and nausea, increased appetite
Foot Reflexology: Involves applying pressure to specific areas on the feet said to correspond to different body parts.	reduce pain, stress and anxiety
Imagery: A technique that redirects and relaxes the mind by focusing on an image or idea that is peaceful, safe and secure.	reduce feelings of depression, help lower blood pressure and heart rate
Massage: There are many types of massage. Generally, it is described as rubbing/kneading of muscles and joints and is practiced to relieve tension or pain. For cancer patients, massage uses a more gentle approach and has many benefits.	improve sleep and immune function, reduce anxiety, pain, fatigue and nausea.
Meditation: The practice of bringing awareness to the present moment by focusing on the breath, bodily sensations or repetition of a word or phrase.	reduce anxiety, depression and stress and improve quality of life
Reiki: A practice that encourages the “flow” of a person’s own positive energy. During a session, the practitioner gently touches or places hands above the patient’s body.	may help reduce pain, stress and anxiety
Tai Chi: An ancient martial art or “moving meditation” where participants focus on deep breathing and precise posture, performing slow, graceful movements.	reduce stress and anxiety, improve quality of life
Yoga: A practice combining physical postures, meditation and breathing techniques. Yoga for those in cancer treatment tends to be low impact and gentle.	improve sleep, mood and circulation, reduce stress, physically strengthen body

Other types: herbal medicine (use of plants to treat illness and promote health); Ayurveda (traditional system of medicine of India that emphasizes diet, herbs, exercise, meditation, breathing, physical therapy); Biofeedback (a technique used to control your body’s functions, such as bowel function); Chiropractic (focuses on disorders of the musculoskeletal and nervous systems, including pain. The most common procedure is “spinal manipulation” or “adjustment”)

This Fact Sheet does not provide an all-inclusive list of CAM approaches.

Are there any complementary health approaches CRC patients and survivors should avoid?

There are certain treatments that have been shown to be ineffective and even dangerous for colorectal cancer patients. Some of these methods include:

- Colonic hydrotherapy
- Chelation therapy
- Ionic foot baths
- Restrictive diets
- Some supplements (talk to your doctor)
- Expensive treatments with little to no benefit!!
- Anything used IN PLACE OF a curative conventional treatment

MORE RESOURCES

ASCO: <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/how-cancer-treated/integrative-medicine>

American Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/complementary-and-alternative-methods-and-cancer/using-cam-safely.html>

NCCIH: <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/integrative-health>

Society for Oncology Massage: <http://www.s4om.org/>

NIH: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3068720/>

Journal of the National Cancer Institute: <https://academic.oup.com/jnci/article/110/1/djx145/4064136/Use-of-Alternative-Medicine-for-Cancer-and-Its>