

## *Integrative Ways To Reduce Side Effects Of Breast Cancer Treatment*

### **What is an integrative approach to breast cancer care?**

Integrative medicine encourages a woman to take charge of her life. It helps women make choices in their lives to help prevent breast cancer, slow its growth if it occurs, and prevent the disease from coming back after it has been treated. It may also help reduce the side effects from cancer treatment. Integrative medicine combines standard medical care with additional ways to prevent or treat a condition. These other ways are called complementary medicine. If a complementary approach might interfere with standard cancer treatment, it is avoided while a woman is receiving treatment. Integrative medicine uses evidence-based therapies when available. These therapies are based on the best available research and clinical experience. Integrative Medicine focuses on healing the body, mind, and spirit. Each person has a unique path to healing. Oftentimes cancer may serve as an opportunity for growth and greater health.

### **Guidelines on Exercise and Nutrition**

The American Cancer Society (ACS) publishes guidelines on nutrition and physical activity. A panel of experts updates these guidelines every five years. If you are reading this handout on-line, click on the link below (or copy and paste it into your browser) to see recommendations for during and after cancer treatment. The guidelines were updated in 2012.

<http://www.cancer.org/Treatment/SurvivorshipDuringandAfterTreatment/NutritionforPeoplewithCancer/nutrition-and-physical-activity-during-and-after-cancer-treatment-answers-to-common-questions>

### **What are some integrative ways to reduce side effects from breast cancer treatment?**

- **Fatigue**

Fatigue is a common symptom of cancer and its treatment. Daily gentle exercise and acupuncture may help.

- **Hot Flashes**

Breast cancer survivors have 10% more sleep problems than women the same age who have never had cancer. These problems tend to last over time. Along with sleep problems, the survivors have hot flashes, depression, more distress, and worse physical conditioning. In one study, breast cancer survivors had less physical activity and more hot flashes than women without breast cancer.

Exercise, acupuncture, and a number of medications may help with hot flashes from menopause. Black cohosh is an herb sold as a diet supplement. It has been used for hot flashes. In one study, black cohosh decreased the risk of breast cancer. Generally it is not helpful in controlling hot flashes. Black cohosh can be harmful to the liver. Use it only with the guidance of your clinician.



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- **Nausea and Vomiting**

Acupuncture, exercise, and ginger may all help reduce nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment. If you try ginger, take 500 to 1000 mg ginger root extract every 4 to 6 hours as needed. Or you can eat 1 teaspoon (5 grams) of crystallized ginger every 2 to 3 hours as needed. Too much ginger can cause heartburn.

Experts evaluating several studies found that medical marijuana relieved nausea and vomiting more than medication. The review included only a small number of studies and patients. Use caution if considering medical marijuana. Further research is needed.



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- **Anxiety/ Stress/ Depression**

Anxiety and depression can be improved in a number of ways. Any of the following approaches may help you to feel better: acupuncture, an 8-week Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Program, yoga, art therapy, exercise, massage therapy, support groups, aromatherapy, dance, journaling, guided imagery, biofeedback, cognitive behavioral therapy, meditation, relaxation, and hypnosis.

- **Sleep Problems**



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You will sleep best if you keep naps short during the day, exercise regularly, sleep in a quiet dark room, and go to sleep at the same time each day. This can help you sleep at night when the melatonin that your body produces is at its best level. (Melatonin is a hormone made by the body. It helps regulate sleep). Relaxation, meditation and yoga may increase melatonin and help you sleep better. Cognitive behavioral therapy may also be helpful. See our [handout \*Improving and Maintaining a Healthy Sleep-Wake Cycle\*](#) for more information.

You can use melatonin in supplemental form. Melatonin should not be taken if you have bipolar disease. It can worsen depression for some people. Check with your doctor before taking melatonin if you use other medication that causes drowsiness. Melatonin comes in two forms: an immediate release preparation for individuals having difficulty falling asleep and a sustained release preparation for those having difficulty staying asleep. The dose ranges from 1 mg to 20 mg taken before you go to bed. Start with a dose of 3 mg before bedtime. Consult with your doctor to adjust this dose as needed to treat your sleep problem without causing a hangover the next day.

- **Pain**

Acupuncture may relieve pain. A study reported in 2010 showed that acupuncture decreased pain, anxiety, depression and fatigue. The Society for Integrative Oncology strongly supports acupuncture for pain. Massage and mind-body therapies may also be very helpful in relieving pain. Exercise helps you stay fit during treatment and reduces pain. Cannabinoids (chemical compounds in marijuana) may help pain caused by damaged nerves. This condition, called peripheral neuropathy, can be a side effect of some chemotherapy drugs.



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- **Lymphedema and Musculoskeletal Issues**

Lymphedema occurs when extra lymph fluid builds up in body tissues and causes swelling. It can occur in your arm if lymph vessels are blocked, damaged, or removed by breast cancer surgery. Lymphatic massage and exercise may prevent some degree of lymphedema. They may also prevent or relieve shoulder problems caused by surgery. One study showed that gentle weight lifting twice a week improved lymphedema and increased strength. A small study reported in 2008 found that acupuncture increased the range of motion in the shoulder and decreased lymphedema and its symptoms of heaviness and tightening.

- **Dermatitis from Radiation Therapy**

Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin. It usually involves an itchy pink or red rash. You can apply calendula cream, which is made from an herb, multiple times daily to the skin affected by radiation to help reduce the severity of the dermatitis. This cream can be purchased at a health store or health pharmacy.

### **Summary: Integrative Ways to Reduce Side Effects From Cancer Treatment**

| <b>SYMPTOM</b>                                 | <b>TREATMENT</b>   |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Fatigue</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Acupuncture</li> </ul>  |   |
| <b>Post menopausal hot flashes</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medications</li> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Exercise</li> </ul>                           |   |
| <b>Nausea and vomiting due to chemotherapy</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Ginger</li> <li>• Cannabis</li> </ul>                                |   |
| <b>Anxiety, stress, depression</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction</li> <li>• Art Therapy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Massage</li> <li>• Support Groups</li> </ul> |
| <b>Sleep problems</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Melatonin</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaxation techniques</li> <li>• Sleep hygiene</li> </ul>                        |
| <b>Pain</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Cannabinoids</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massage</li> <li>• Mind-body therapies</li> </ul>                                |
| <b>Lymphedema</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Lymphatic massage</li> </ul>                     |   |
| <b>Radiation dermatitis</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calendula cream</li> </ul>  |   |

#### **PATIENT HANDOUT**



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You may also want to see our handouts on [Breast Cancer Care and Prevention: Non-Drug Approaches](#) and [Breast Cancer Care and Prevention: Guidelines for a Healthy Lifestyle](#).

**WEBSITE RESOURCES**

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>American Cancer Society</b>  | Guidelines for exercise and nutrition during and after cancer treatment.   | <a href="http://www.cancer.org/Treatment/SurvivorshipDuringandAfterTreatment/NutritionforPeoplewithCancer/nutrition-and-physical-activity-during-and-after-cancer-treatment-answers-to-common-questions">http://www.cancer.org/Treatment/SurvivorshipDuringandAfterTreatment/NutritionforPeoplewithCancer/nutrition-and-physical-activity-during-and-after-cancer-treatment-answers-to-common-questions</a> |
| <b>Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation</b>  | Education and research about causes, treatment, and the search for a cure.   | <a href="http://www.komen.org">www.komen.org</a>  |
| <b>Breast Cancer Recovery</b>   | Its mission is to help women heal in mind, body and spirit after breast cancer. All programs are designed and conducted by survivors for survivors.                          | <a href="http://www.bcrecovery.org">www.bcrecovery.org</a>  |
| <b>National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute (NCI) Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (OCCAM)</b> | Evidence based information on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) for cancer.   | <a href="http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cam">http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cam</a>   |
| <b>National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements</b>   | Information on dietary supplements.  | <a href="http://www.dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov">http://www.dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov</a>   |
| <b>Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center</b>   | Search a database for evidence-based information on herbs, botanicals, vitamins, and other supplements. It includes evaluations of alternative or unproven cancer therapies. | <a href="http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm">http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm</a>   |
| <b>The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center</b>  | Evidence based review of CAM and integrative medicine therapies.   | <a href="http://www.mdanderson.org/CIMER">www.mdanderson.org/CIMER</a>  |



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***The information in this handout is for general education. It is not meant to be used by a patient alone. Please work with your health care practitioner to use this information in the best way possible to promote your health.***

References, if needed, can be found in the clinician version of this handout.

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**Notes:**