



# Understanding Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer,  
their families and friends



Treatment

For information & support, call

**13 11 20**



## Understanding Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends

First published October 2008. This edition May 2015.

© The Cancer Council NSW 2015. ISBN 978 1 925136 51 7

*Understanding Complementary Therapies* is reviewed approximately every three years. Check the publication date above to ensure this copy is up to date.

Editor: Cath Grove. Designer: Paula Marchant. Printer: SOS Print + Media Group.

### Acknowledgements

This edition has been developed by Cancer Council NSW on behalf of all other state and territory Cancer Councils as part of a National Publications Working Group Initiative.

We thank the reviewers of this edition: Dr Haryana Dhillon, Research Fellow, Survivorship Research Group, Deputy Director, Centre for Medical Psychology & Evidence-based Decision-making, University of Sydney, and Chair, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia Survivorship Group, NSW; Dr Kylie Dodsworth, GP, Vice-President, Australasian Integrative Medicine Association, SA; Lauren Muir, Accredited Practising Dietitian, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, VIC; Shavita Patel, 13 11 20 Consultant, Cancer Council WA; A/Prof Evelin Tiralongo, Lecturer and Researcher in Complementary Medicine, School of Pharmacy, Griffith University, QLD; Gabrielle Toth, Consumer; Dr Xiaoshu Zhu, Director, Academic Program for Chinese Medicine, Senior Lecturer, School of Science and Health, and Researcher, National Institute of Complementary Medicine, University of Western Sydney, NSW. We thank the men and women who shared stories about their use of complementary therapies as part of their wider cancer care. We would also like to thank the health professionals and consumers who worked on the previous editions of this title, and Vivienne O'Callaghan, the original writer.

### Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This booklet is intended as a general introduction to the topic and should not be seen as a substitute for medical, legal or financial advice. You should obtain independent advice relevant to your specific situation from appropriate professionals and you may wish to discuss issues raised in this book with them.

All care is taken to ensure that the information in this booklet is accurate at the time of publication. Please note that information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community. Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this booklet.

### Cancer Council

Cancer Council is Australia's peak non-government cancer control organisation. Through the eight state and territory Cancer Councils, we provide a broad range of programs and services to help improve the quality of life of people living with cancer, their families and friends. Cancer Councils also invest heavily in research and prevention. To make a donation and help us beat cancer, visit [cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au) or call your local Cancer Council.



### Cancer Council Australia

Level 14, 477 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

**Telephone** 02 8063 4100 **Facsimile** 02 8063 4101

**Email** [info@cancer.org.au](mailto:info@cancer.org.au) **Website** [cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au)

ABN 91 130 793 725

# 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 your quality of life.

This booklet provides an overview of the role of a number of complementary therapies in cancer care. It does not include in-depth information about alternative therapies, which some people choose instead of conventional treatment.

If you want to consider using complementary therapies, discuss this with your doctors, pharmacists and other health professionals qualified in the therapies you are interested in.

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.

If you or your family have any questions, call Cancer Council **13 11 20**. We can send you more information and connect you with support services in your area. Turn to the last page of this book for more details.



**Cancer  
Council  
13 11 20**

# Contents

<b>What is cancer?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Cancer treatments</b> .....	<b>6</b>
What is the evidence? .....	7
<b>Key questions</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Who uses complementary therapies? .....	10
Why do people use these therapies? .....	10
Which therapies work? .....	11
Should I tell my doctor? .....	13
Are they safe? .....	13
What should I do if something goes wrong? .....	16
<b>Holistic approaches to health care</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Naturopathy .....	19
Traditional Chinese medicine .....	21
Ayurvedic medicine .....	22
Homoeopathy .....	23
<b>Mind–body techniques</b> .....	<b>24</b>
Support groups .....	26
Relaxation and meditation .....	27
Counselling .....	28
Hypnotherapy .....	31
Art therapy .....	31
Music therapy .....	32
Life coaching .....	33
Spiritual practices .....	34
<b>Body-based practices</b> .....	<b>35</b>
Aromatherapy .....	35
Yoga .....	38
Massage .....	39

Acupuncture .....	40
Energy therapies.....	41
Reflexology.....	42
Tai chi .....	43
Qi gong.....	44
Other active exercise techniques .....	45

**Therapies using herbs 47**

Western herbal medicine.....	49
Chinese herbal medicine.....	51

**Therapies based on diet 53**

Naturopathic nutrition.....	54
-----------------------------	----

**Other therapies 56**

Homoeopathy.....	56
Flower remedies.....	57

**Making treatment decisions..... 59**

Finding a complementary therapist.....	61
Can I help myself or should I see a professional?.....	62
Talking with others.....	64
A second opinion .....	64
Costs .....	64
Taking part in a clinical trial .....	65

**Caring for someone with cancer ..... 67**

**Cancer Council services..... 68**

**Professional associations..... 70**

**Useful websites ..... 72**

**Question checklist..... 73**

**Glossary ..... 77**

**How you can help..... 84**



# What is cancer?

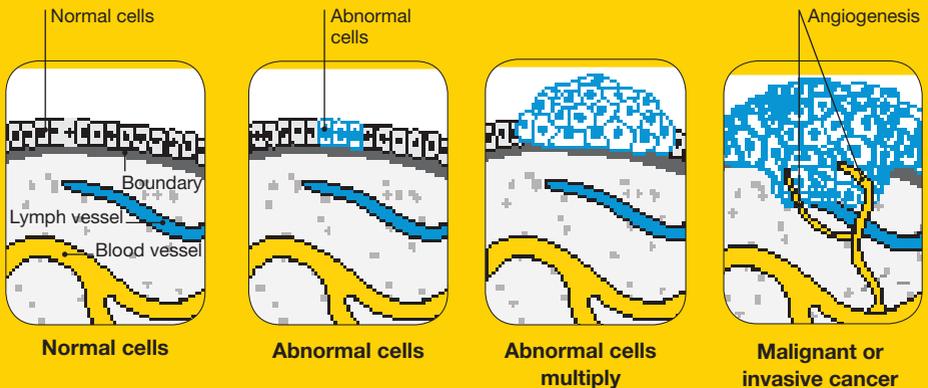
Cancer is a disease of the cells, which are the body's basic building blocks. The body constantly makes new cells to help us grow, replace worn-out tissue and heal injuries. Normally, cells multiply and die in an orderly way.

Sometimes cells don't grow, divide and die in the usual way. This may cause blood or lymph fluid in the body to become abnormal, or form a lump called a tumour. A tumour can be benign or malignant.

**Benign tumour** – Cells are confined to one area and are not able to spread to other parts of the body. This is not cancer.

**Malignant tumour** – This is made up of cancerous cells, which have the ability to spread by travelling through the bloodstream or lymphatic system (lymph fluid).

## How cancer starts



The cancer that first develops in a tissue or organ is called the primary cancer. A malignant tumour is usually named after the organ or type of cell affected.

A malignant tumour that has not spread to other parts of the body is called localised cancer. A tumour may invade deeper into surrounding tissue and can grow its own blood vessels (angiogenesis).

If cancerous cells grow and form another tumour at a new site, it is called a secondary cancer or metastasis. A metastasis keeps the name of the original cancer. For example, liver cancer that has spread to the bones is called metastatic liver cancer, even though the person may be experiencing symptoms caused by problems in the bones.

## How cancer spreads

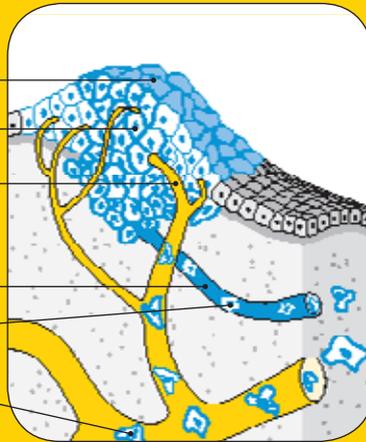
Primary cancer

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





# Cancer treatments

The most effective form of treatment for cancer is conventional medicine. Some people use complementary therapies as well to relieve side effects of their cancer treatments. Alternative therapies have not been shown to be effective in treating cancer.

- **Conventional medicine** – This can be used to control or cure cancer by slowing or stopping the growth and spread of the disease. It can also provide relief from symptoms. Conventional treatments are based on scientific evidence and successful clinical trials, and include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone treatment. The treatment you have depends on the type, stage and location of the cancer, your age and general health.
- **Complementary therapies and medicines** – These tend to focus on the whole person, not just the cancer. They may help people cope better with symptoms of cancer and/or side effects caused by conventional treatments. Research into complementary therapies and medicines is increasing.
- **Alternative therapies and medicines** – These are used in place of conventional medical treatments. This can delay or stop the cancer being treated effectively. Many alternative therapies have not been scientifically tested, so there is no proof they stop cancer growing or spreading. Others have been shown to not be effective. Side effects of alternative treatments are not always known.



Integrative medicine is the combined use of conventional cancer treatments and evidence-based complementary therapies.

## What is the evidence?

Conventional cancer treatments have been through a rigorous testing process to see how safe and effective they are. 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. The results are looked at by independent experts (peer-reviewed) and published in medical journals. If the new treatment works better than existing treatments, it may become the new standard treatment. This process provides the scientific evidence for the treatment.

With the increasing use of complementary therapies, many are now being scientifically tested to see what effects they have on people with cancer, how they interact with conventional treatments and why they might be effective.

Many of these tests have explored whether complementary therapies and medicines are effective in reducing specific symptoms to help people feel better during and after conventional cancer treatment. Some therapies are supported by strong evidence, while others lack rigorous scientific evidence.

To find out more about clinical trials, call Cancer Council **13 11 20** for a free copy of *Understanding Clinical Trials and Research*.



Many alternative therapies and medicines have not been scientifically tested, or they have been tested and shown not to work or to be harmful to people with cancer. Some alternative practitioners promote their therapies and medicines as a cure for cancer, and encourage people to stop using conventional cancer treatment. If this is something you are considering, discuss this with your doctor first.

Alternative therapies can be expensive, and they are not covered by Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS – a government-funded scheme that subsidises some prescription medicines). It is important to consider the cost of these therapies if you are thinking about using them.

Cancer Council does not recommend the use of alternative therapies as a treatment for cancer. Only complementary therapies that have been proven to be safe to use alongside conventional cancer treatments are discussed in this booklet.

### **‘Complementary’ vs ‘alternative’**

The terms ‘complementary’ and ‘alternative’ are often used interchangeably, which can be confusing. Complementary therapies are designed to be used alongside conventional cancer treatments, usually to manage side effects. Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional treatment. Many complementary therapies are being scientifically researched for use in people with cancer, while alternative therapies are unlikely to be tested in this way.

## Safety of alternative therapies

Keep the following warning signs in mind if you are thinking about using an alternative cancer treatment instead of conventional medicine:

- The practitioner does not have a qualification from an accredited educational institution in the therapy they provide.
- The practitioner is not registered with a governing body or a professional association.
- The practitioner tells you that conventional medical treatment will stop the therapy or remedy they provide from working.
- The practitioner asks you not to talk to your doctors about their treatment, or won't tell you the ingredients that make up a herbal preparation they give you.
- The practitioner claims that their treatment cures cancer.
- The practitioner says there are clinical studies for the effectiveness of their remedy or therapy, but does not show you proof that has appeared in trusted medical journals.
- 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.

---

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) tracks health and medical scams in an effort to keep the public informed about which scams are in circulation. To find out more, visit [scamwatch.gov.au](https://www.scamwatch.gov.au) or [accg.gov.au](https://www.accc.gov.au).



## Key questions

### **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.<sup>1</sup>

Women are the most common users of complementary therapies, particularly those with breast cancer. 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 some, 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 conventional cancer 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
- helping with changes in sexuality (libido, self-esteem and intimate relationships)
- enhancing quality of life
- helping with palliative care.

## Complementary therapy use in palliative care

Complementary therapies are often used by palliative care patients to help improve their general wellbeing. Most health professionals who are involved in palliative care will be sympathetic if you choose to explore and use complementary therapies. The care team may warn against some therapies they believe are harmful, but you always have the right to choose your own treatment while also receiving the best care from health professionals.

## Q: Which therapies work?

**A:** Cancer Council supports the use of complementary therapies that have been proven to be safe and effective in scientific studies. Not all therapies in this book have been scientifically proven to be clinically effective. Where the evidence is not available, the possible benefits and any harm they might cause should be considered by you and your health care team. Personal (anecdotal) evidence from people with cancer and, in some cases, a long history of use in traditional medicine suggest that particular therapies are worth exploring and may be useful for some people. Evidence supporting the different therapies is included in the chapters *Mind-body techniques* (page 24), *Body-based practices* (page 35), *Therapies using herbs* (page 47), *Therapies based on diet* (page 53) and *Other therapies* (page 56).

In clinical trials, some therapies have been shown to be helpful for the various effects of cancer and its treatment. These are listed on the next page.

<b>Complementary therapy</b>	<b>Clinically proven benefits</b>
<b>meditation, relaxation</b>	reduce stress, anxiety and fatigue; improve quality of life
<b>counselling, support groups</b>	help reduce distress, anxiety and depression; improve quality of life
<b>art therapy, music therapy</b>	reduce anxiety; aid expression of feelings
<b>spiritual practices</b>	help reduce stress; instil peace; improve ability to manage challenges
<b>massage</b>	improves quality of life; reduces anxiety, depression and muscle tension
<b>aromatherapy</b>	aids relaxation and sleep; improves overall wellbeing
<b>acupuncture</b>	reduces chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting; decreases fatigue; improves quality of life
<b>yoga</b>	improves general wellbeing and quality of life
<b>hypnotherapy</b>	reduces pain, anxiety, nausea and vomiting
<b>naturopathic nutrition</b>	prevents and manages malnutrition; helps heal wounds and damaged tissue; improves quality of life
<b>qi gong</b>	improves quality of life
<b>tai chi</b>	improves strength, flexibility and quality of life

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

**A:** Yes. Discuss any therapy you may be using or are thinking about using with your doctors. It's important to tell your doctors before you start using any complementary therapy, especially if you are having chemotherapy or radiotherapy or taking medication. See page 63 for more information.

It's also important to tell your complementary therapist that you have cancer, and advise them of the treatment you're having.

## **Q: Are they safe?**

**A:** Many complementary therapies are usually safe to use together with conventional cancer treatment. However, some complementary therapies can affect the way conventional treatments work, and even stop them from working altogether. See the individual therapies information (pages 24–58) for more details on potential side effects and other considerations.

Be sure to seek a qualified complementary therapist who can provide you with an expert opinion and ongoing support, and is happy to work with you and your health care team.

## **Regulation of medicinal products**

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is a federal government department that regulates all medicines sold in Australia, including complementary medicines. This includes herbs, vitamins, minerals, nutritional supplements, homoeopathic remedies and some aromatherapy products.

The regulation of complementary medicines helps to protect the public by ensuring that therapeutic goods are manufactured according to Good Manufacturing Practice and that any adverse reactions can be investigated.

Before they are supplied in Australia, all therapeutic goods – whether manufactured in Australia or overseas – must be included on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG). Australia has a two-tiered system for regulating all medicinal products, including prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines. Medicines will be given one of the following two codes:

- **Aust L (listed)** – These products can make only low-level therapeutic claims and can include only ingredients approved by the TGA as safe. They are not evaluated by the TGA prior to entry on the ARTG, but they may be reviewed by the TGA once they are on the ARTG.
- **Aust R (registered)** – Because these products are considered higher risk, they are fully evaluated by the TGA for safety, quality and efficacy before being included on the ARTG. All prescription medicines, most over-the-counter medicines and some higher-risk complementary medicines are registered.

There is no assurance for consumers that complementary medicines that are not included on the ARTG have been manufactured to Australian standards of quality and safety.



For more information on the safety, labelling and regulation of medicines, visit [tga.gov.au](https://www.tga.gov.au).

## 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 also regulates other health practitioners, such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists. AHPRA ensures that practitioners are adequately qualified to practise.

### **Naturopaths and Western herbalists**

– These practitioners are not registered by AHPRA. However, most naturopaths and herbalists are members of the Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists. This is a self-governing body that maintains a certain standard of practice for both professions.

### **Homoeopaths**

– These practitioners are not registered by AHPRA. However, the Australian Register Of Homoeopaths (AROH) is a non-government organisation that represents homoeopaths who are qualified to practise in line with standards set by the government. The AROH outlines certain professional standards for registered homoeopaths, who must meet continuing education requirements each year.

## Q: What should I do if something goes wrong?

**A:** If you experience any side effects that you think are from a complementary treatment, stop the treatment and talk to your practitioner. They will work out how to change your treatment to reduce the chance of the problem recurring. If this does not resolve the issue, you may decide to stop the treatment permanently, consider seeking a second opinion, or transfer your care to another qualified practitioner. If you are concerned that 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 (see pages 70–71 for contact details). They may be able to investigate and decide what action to take.
- Report adverse reactions directly to NPS MedicineWise’s Adverse Medicine Events Line on 1300 134 237. You can also tell your doctor, who will report it to the TGA.
- Contact the health care complaints commission in your state or territory. This organisation protects public health and safety by investigating and resolving complaints about health care providers. It can also prosecute serious complaints.
- If you have a serious reaction that needs immediate medical attention, call 000 or go straight to your nearest emergency department.

## Making complaints about health care providers

State/ territory	Contact details
<b>ACT</b>	<b>ACT Human Rights Commission</b> 02 6205 2222 hrc.act.gov.au
<b>NSW</b>	<b>Health Care Complaints Commission</b> 1800 043 159 hccc.nsw.gov.au
<b>NT</b>	<b>Health and Community Services Complaints Commission</b> 1800 004 474 www.hcsc.nt.gov.au
<b>QLD</b>	<b>Office of the Health Ombudsman</b> 133 646 oho.qld.gov.au
<b>SA</b>	<b>Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner</b> 08 8226 8666; 1800 232 007 (toll free from country SA) hcsc.sa.gov.au
<b>TAS</b>	<b>Health Complaints Commissioner Tasmania</b> 1800 001 170 www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au
<b>VIC</b>	<b>Office of the Health Services Commissioner</b> 1300 582 113 health.vic.gov.au/hsc
<b>WA</b>	<b>Health and Disability Services Complaints Office</b> 08 6551 7600; 1800 813 583 (toll free from country WA) hadsc.wa.gov.au



## 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.
- People may have more than one reason for using a complementary therapy. Some reasons include feeling more in control, liking the idea of treating the whole person, and enhancing quality of life.
- There is less scientific evidence available about the safety and effectiveness of complementary therapies than there is for conventional treatments.
- Always seek a qualified practitioner with relevant qualifications who can provide you with an expert opinion and is happy to work with you and your doctor.
- The federal government's Therapeutic Goods Administration is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods sold in Australia. These include complementary medicines such as minerals, vitamins, herbal medicines, nutritional supplements, homoeopathic medicines and some aromatherapy products.
- 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 medication from working properly or causing side effects.
- It is important that you talk to your doctor if you are thinking about using alternative therapies instead of conventional cancer treatments.



# 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, not just the disease and its symptoms.

In Australia, the main traditional holistic health care systems practised are naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine and homoeopathy. Their origins differ, but they share the following 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 a person's symptoms using a combination of dietary changes, bodywork such as various forms of massage, and herbal medicines or nutritional supplements.



## Alan's story

In 2010, I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer. It was quite a shock for me and my then fiancée (now my wife). We'd never heard of it.

I was in a lot of pain and wasn't able to move, but my doctor put me on a combination of drugs. Within a few weeks I was feeling less pain.

Since then I've had a lot of treatment. I had a bone marrow transplant, with my brother as the donor, a week after my wedding. At one point I was taking 28 tablets a day.

One morning I woke up with a metallic taste in my mouth and found I couldn't taste any food. I saw doctors, dietitians and nutritionists, but no-one could explain why I had lost my sense of taste or if it would come back. Wondering what I was going to eat became all I could think about.

I decided I'd do everything in my power to help myself. I did some research online and found that having low levels of zinc and B vitamins can cause a loss of taste and smell. A friend recommended I see a naturopath.

At my first appointment the naturopath asked me about the myeloma and my treatments. He also tested my zinc levels by giving me a spoonful of zinc solution and asking me what I could taste, which was nothing.

He suggested I take zinc and vitamin B supplements. Because I'm on a clinical trial, I checked with the nurses beforehand. They were very encouraging and said it would be okay.

After two months I started to regain my sense of taste and smell. My wife's a great cook and I can't wait to have some of her food. You can't expect a quick fix – I know using the supplements will take time.

**What to expect:** After taking a case history, a naturopath may suggest a combination of diet changes, bodywork or exercise, and herbal or nutritional remedies.

**Evidence:** The benefits of some aspects of naturopathy, such as massage and nutrition (excluding extreme dietary practices), have good clinical evidence for people with cancer. Other aspects of naturopathy have mixed levels of evidence. See individual therapies for more information.

## Traditional Chinese medicine

**What it is:** Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is based on using 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 (qi) and cope with the side effects of conventional treatment. TCM includes acupuncture, tai chi, qi gong 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 looking at your tongue and taking your pulse (tongue and pulse analysis), to work out the flow of energy and imbalances in your body. Treatment may include one or more of the therapies listed above.

**Evidence:** There is clinical evidence for the benefits of some aspects of TCM for people with cancer, while for other aspects the evidence is limited. 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. People who use TCM believe that 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 the two 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.

## Ayurvedic medicine

**What it is:** Ayurvedic medicine is an ancient Indian system that was founded on the concept that health is achieved when the mind, body and spirit are in balance. Ayurvedic practitioners use a wide range of therapies, including nutritional and herbal medicine, massage, meditation and yoga.

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

**Evidence:** There is good evidence for the effectiveness of some 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. See individual therapies for further information.

## 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 with the consumption of small doses of highly diluted substances. In larger doses these substances would produce the illness or symptoms. Homoeopathic remedies are available as tablets, liquids or creams.

See pages 56–57 for information on what to expect during a consultation and evidence for homoeopathy.

### 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.

Talk to your doctor if you would like to use traditional remedies from your culture.



# 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 support groups, counselling, hypnotherapy, relaxation, meditation, spiritual practices, life coaching, art therapy and music therapy.

Some techniques, such as support groups and counselling, have now become part of standard cancer care. Spiritual practices are also discussed because of the important part they play in many people’s lives and their 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 first directed at the physical body (e.g. moving the limbs into a certain pose), they are described further in the *Body-based practices* chapter (see page 35).

### Types of mind-body techniques

Practising mind-body techniques will help to change your mental and emotional state, which can help you feel more relaxed and more able to cope with life.



**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, fear and difficulty sleeping, which can all affect mood and overall wellbeing. Using self-help techniques may help people feel more in control of their situation 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.

## Support groups

**What they are:** Organised groups where people with cancer and their families can meet other people going through a similar experience. They include face-to-face and telephone support groups, online discussion forums and peer support programs.

**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. Research has found that joining a group helps reduce distress, depression and anxiety. Studies have also shown benefits in people using online health forums.

Call Cancer Council **13 11 20** for information on counselling, support programs and online discussion groups.



## Relaxation and meditation

**What they are:** Relaxation usually includes slow breathing and muscle-loosening exercises to physically and mentally calm the body. Meditation is an ancient practice that involves focusing on a single thing, such as your breathing. There are many different types of meditation. Mindfulness meditation means being aware and present in each moment, while guided imagery or visualisation use your imagination to create healing thoughts.

**Why use them:** Relaxation and meditation may help to release muscle tension and reduce 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 state of mind.

**Evidence:** There is good evidence to show that relaxation and meditation lower the levels of stress hormones in your body, which can assist in healing and improving immune function. Clinical studies have shown that people being treated for cancer who practise relaxation have lower levels of anxiety, stress, pain and depression. Studies on meditation have shown it helps improve the quality of life of people with cancer, increases coping, and can reduce pain, anxiety, depression and nausea.



Some hospitals, cancer support groups and community centres offer relaxation and meditation groups. There are also many self-help CDs, DVDs and smartphone apps that will guide you through the different techniques. Cancer Council produces relaxation and meditation CDs. Call **13 11 20** for free copies.

## Counselling

**What it is:** Through discussions with a counsellor or psychologist, you can identify both positive and troubling aspects in your life. You may choose to focus on your goals or your positive relationships, or you may decide to discuss particular problems or challenges you are facing. Counselling allows you to 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 identify, understand and express your emotions, motivations, life choices and behaviours in a safe, objective and confidential environment. It can help with self-esteem, communication and relationships.

**What to expect:** Consultations are usually face to face, but if you live in a remote area or require crisis counselling, you may be able to talk with a counsellor over the phone or online.

A counsellor will ask questions about why you have decided to speak to them and what aspects of your life you wish to talk about. They can often help you to clarify your thoughts so you can work out how to resolve any challenges yourself. Sometimes a counsellor will simply provide a non-judgemental, listening ear to allow you to talk through events that have caused you to feel negative emotions.

**Evidence:** There is long-established evidence of the benefits of counselling. However, it is important that you find a suitably qualified counsellor you feel comfortable talking with. Ask your general practitioner (GP) for a referral.

### Cognitive behaviour therapy

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is a common type of talk therapy psychologists use to help people identify unhelpful thoughts and behaviours, and change how they respond to negative situations or emotions. CBT can teach you how to calm your body and mind, focus your thinking and improve your outlook.

## Differences between counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists

<b>Counsellor</b>	<p>A counsellor's education may range from a vocational certificate in counselling through to university-level studies in psychology, social work or counselling. There is no one standard of qualification required. Counsellors listen to clients, offer support and help them come up with strategies for managing the issues they choose to focus on. Counsellors do not prescribe medication, but if they are also qualified in a complementary therapies discipline, such as flower remedies (see page 57), they may dispense these as part of their treatment plan.</p>
<b>Psychologist</b>	<p>A registered psychologist in Australia must complete four years of psychology at university 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 people through issues with how they think, feel and learn. They cannot prescribe medication.</p>
<b>Psychiatrist</b>	<p>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.</p>

See your GP for a referral to these practitioners, as you may be eligible for a Medicare rebate for some of these services.

## Hypnotherapy

**What it is:** Deep relaxation that 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 such as smoking.

**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, anxiety and nausea related to cancer treatment.

## Art therapy

**What 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 on the process of producing artwork, not the end result. Your art may be created any way: drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or digital work. 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:** Clinical studies have shown that art therapy leads to improvements in symptoms of fatigue. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it improves coping skills, 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. Art therapy helped me find a way to share my experience. It was very positive. ” *Ray (prostate cancer)*

## Music therapy

**What it is:** The use of 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 simply enjoy themselves in the moment.

**What to expect:** Music 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 affects you.

**Evidence:** Some studies in people with cancer have shown that music therapy can improve quality of life and reduce side effects of treatment such as anxiety and nausea.

## Life coaching

**What it is:** Life coaching is a type of counselling in which a coach works with you to set goals and work out ways to change your life to achieve them.

**Why use it:** Life coaching allows people to make positive changes for their future. It helps people develop their personal, spiritual, physical and professional lives.

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

**Evidence:** There is limited clinical evidence available about the benefits of life coaching. However, one small study has shown that it may help people cope better with life after cancer treatment.

## Spiritual practices

**What they are:** 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, the spiritual aspect of their lives becomes more important.

**Why use them:** 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.

If you are not part of a formal community, you can seek further information and support about your area of spiritual interest from support groups, friendship groups, your local library or online.

**Evidence:** There is growing scientific evidence of a positive link between spiritual practices and health.



# Body-based practices

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

- **Passive bodywork techniques** – include therapies where some form of touch or manual pressure is applied to your body or the unseen energy field surrounding your body. Examples include aromatherapy, massage and reflexology.
- **Active exercise techniques** – require you to actively undertake a series of movements to stimulate and stretch different parts of the body. Examples include yoga, tai chi and Pilates.

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

Body-based practices are also called bodywork or physical, manual, tactile, touch, manipulative or exercise therapies. Techniques involving energy work are sometimes called energy therapies.

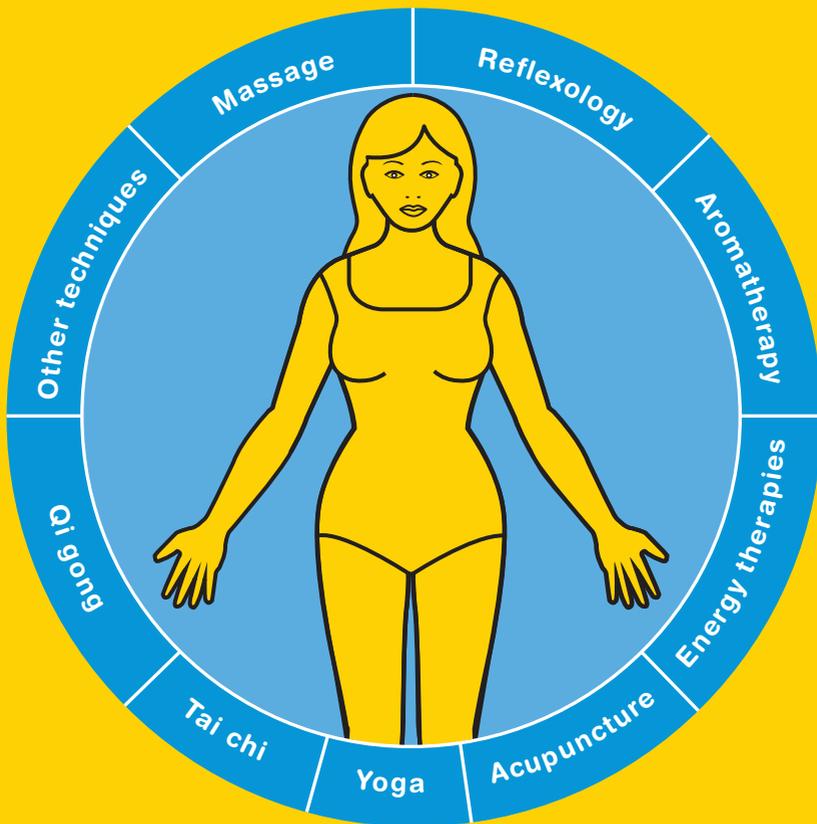


## Aromatherapy

**What it 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).

## Types of body-based practices

While the practitioners of body-based practices have differing techniques, they all aim to help people heal both physically and mentally, and tailor treatments to each person's specific needs.



**Why use it:** When inhaled or absorbed through the skin, the oils stimulate 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. The oils may also be used in an oil burner. Different blends have different effects on your mood or any symptoms you are experiencing, such as fatigue, pain, sleeplessness or nausea. If you find a particular aroma unpleasant, let your therapist know.

**Evidence:** Some studies have shown that aromatherapy reduces anxiety in people with cancer. Studies in people with advanced cancer show that aromatherapy improves quality of life by aiding sleep.

### 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 of essential oils 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.

## Yoga

**What it is:** Yoga involves performing poses with the body, slowing and deepening the breath, and focusing the mind. Yoga originated in India and 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:** Yoga 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 yoga postures, and ends with relaxation.

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



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

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

## 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 (swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid). This is called lymphatic drainage.

**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 require you to undress to your underwear so the therapist can use oil to move their hands over your skin more easily.

**Evidence:** Many scientific studies have shown that massage can reduce pain, anxiety, depression and nausea in people who have had chemotherapy or surgery for cancer. Specialised lymphatic massage can help reduce the symptoms of lymphoedema.

Call Cancer Council 13 11 20 for a free copy of *Massage and Cancer*.

## Acupuncture

**What it is:** Acupuncturists put fine, sterile needles just under the skin into meridians (energy channels) in the body. Each meridian has many acupuncture points along its path.

**Why use it:** Acupuncture is based on the theory that the placement of needles into certain points of the body unblocks and moves qi (energy) to strengthen vital force (see page 22) and reduce physical and emotional symptoms. The exact mechanism of acupuncture remains largely unclear. However, evidence indicates that needles may stimulate nerves to release the body's own natural chemicals, which help reduce pain or regulate the brain and other functions.



Some qualified and registered acupuncturists in Australia have special training and experience in treating cancer-related conditions. Ask your doctor whether this is offered at your treatment centre.

**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 (called press needles), which can remain in place for several days. These needles can be pressed to relieve some symptoms, such as insomnia or nausea.

**Evidence:** The main areas of research into acupuncture for cancer are chemotherapy-related nausea and cancer pain, and some clinical trials have shown promising results. Anecdotal evidence suggests acupuncture is relaxing and reduces anxiety.

## Energy therapies

**What they are:** These therapies are founded on the concept that all living beings have an energy field around them and flowing through them, and that this field can be altered or disturbed in association with illness. Energy therapies aim to restore balance to assist in healing. Techniques include:

- Bowen therapy
- polarity therapy
- reiki
- healing touch
- therapeutic touch.

**Why use them:** Energy therapies are often used by people with cancer, as they are very gentle and do not require the therapist to make many heavy physical adjustments. The aim is to help increase energy levels, promote relaxation and wellbeing, and assist in overall healing.

**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, many traditional healing therapies, such as tai chi, acupuncture and yoga, are based on complex systems of meridians (energy channels) within and around the body. Anecdotal evidence also shows that energy therapies can provide a deep sense of calm and relaxation, often helping to relieve pain and anxiety, reduce stiffness and improve posture.

## 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. Practitioners believe that by pressing on reflex points, 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 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, nausea and anxiety. Results are mixed and studies have involved small groups of people, so it is difficult to say whether the reflexology had any effect.

## Tai chi

**What it is:** A part of traditional Chinese medicine that combines movement, breathing techniques and meditation. Movements create stability in the body, reflecting an ancient Chinese concept of balance known as Yin and Yang (see page 22).

**Why use it:** The breath work of tai chi is calming and meditative, while creating and holding the poses helps to 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, for example, ‘white crane spreads 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:** Studies have shown that tai chi improves quality of life, balance, agility, flexibility and muscle tone in cancer survivors. It can also help reduce stress.

## 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. Qi gong combines movement with controlled breathing and meditation.

**Why use it:** Movements performed in qi gong 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 basic to complex. The exercises, which are usually very calming, help you become more aware of your energy. Classes might also include meditation while you are lying down, sitting, standing or walking.

**Evidence:** Clinical studies suggest that qi gong improves quality of life and reduces fatigue. Anecdotal evidence shows that it helps to reduce anxiety and improves general fitness.

“ Qi gong was very calming and made me 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. ” Margaret (breast cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma)

## Other active exercise techniques

There are other exercise techniques you might like to explore. Although studies involving people with cancer are limited, these therapies are generally accepted as being beneficial for improving strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing. Some treatment centres will have exercise physiologists and physiotherapists who are specially trained in exercise interventions for people with medical conditions and injuries.

**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.

**Resistance training or lifting weights** – This active exercise technique is growing in popularity, particularly for people who have had treatment for breast cancer. Also called strength training, it involves the use of weights, weight machines at gyms and your own body weight to strengthen muscles. Research shows that breast cancer survivors with lymphoedema who participate in a supervised weightlifting program are less likely to experience worsening symptoms than people who do not do strength training.

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

**Cardiovascular (aerobic) exercise** – This has been shown to be highly beneficial for people with cancer. It has important benefits during treatment as it may reduce the onset of side effects and their severity, maintain mood and improve energy levels. Cardiovascular exercise also helps people maintain muscle mass (strength). Studies are being conducted into its impact on recurrence (relapse) and survival in people with certain types of cancer.

Call Cancer Council 13 11 20 for a free copy of *Exercise for People Living with Cancer* and to find out about free exercise programs for people with cancer and their carers in your area.



YWCA Encore is a free eight-week program of gentle exercise and relaxation for people who have had breast cancer. Classes are available in all states and territories. Visit [ywcaencore.org.au](http://ywcaencore.org.au).



# Therapies using herbs

Herbal remedies have been used throughout history and in many traditional medicine systems. Herbal medicines are produced from various parts of plants containing active ingredients that can cause chemical changes in the body. Herbal preparations can be consumed or applied to the skin to treat disease and promote health. Therapies using herbs can also be called botanical medicine.

**Benefits:** Many scientific studies have examined the effects of various herbs on people with cancer. Some remedies have been proven to reduce side effects of cancer treatment. While many remedies don't have scientific backing, historical usage suggests they may help with skin conditions and energy levels in people who have cancer.

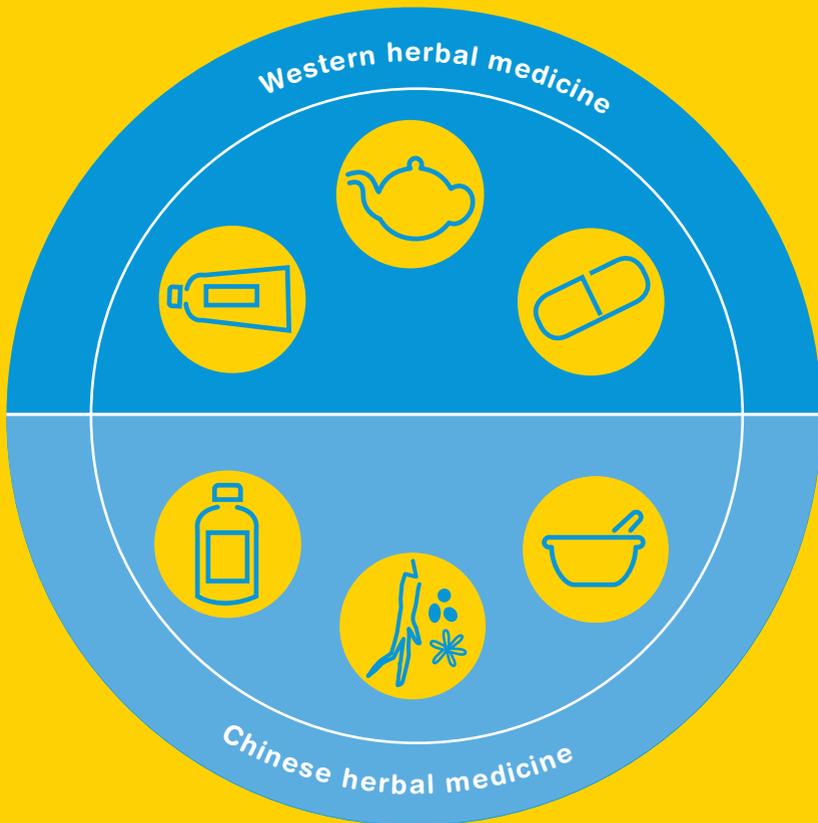
**Side effects:** Some herbs may cause unwanted side effects and interact with conventional cancer treatment. For more information on the effects of specific herbs and botanicals, visit the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center website, [mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine](https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine).

## Do herbs cure cancer?

There is no reliable scientific evidence that herbal remedies alone can cure or treat cancer. However, some plant extracts have been found to have anti-cancer effects and have been turned into chemotherapy drugs. These include vincristine from the periwinkle plant, and taxanes from the bark of the Pacific yew tree.

## Types of therapies using herbs

Many herbs used in Western and Chinese herbal medicine have been scientifically tested for their safety and effectiveness. They can help reduce the side effects of some cancer treatments.



## Western herbal medicine

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

**Why use it:** Herbal preparations are often used to help with the side effects of conventional cancer treatments, such as lowering fatigue and improving wellbeing. Evidence shows they should be used in addition to conventional therapies, rather than as an alternative.

**What to expect:** After taking a case history, the practitioner puts together a holistic picture of your health. They will look for underlying reasons for your ill health or the symptoms you have, and dispense a remedy addressing the causes and symptoms of your illness. They may give you a pre-made herbal formula or make up a blend of herbs specifically for your needs. Herbal medicines can be prepared as liquid extracts that are taken with water or as a tea (infusion). They can also be prepared as creams or tablets.

**Evidence:** There is a wide body of research into the effectiveness and safety of many herbs, and some studies show promising results. Speak to your doctor and herbal medicine practitioner about the potential side effects of any herbal preparations.

Many pharmacies and health food stores sell herbal preparations. Ask your complementary therapist or pharmacist if these are of high quality and meet Australian standards (see pages 13–14).



## tips

- 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.
- Avoid self-prescribing with over-the-counter products from a health food shop, pharmacy or the internet. Be aware that products from other countries that are sold over the internet are not subject to the same quality and safety 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.
- 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 safely. Talk to your doctor and complementary health practitioner, or call NPS MedicineWise'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, speak to your practitioner or call the NPS MedicineWise Adverse Medicine Events Line on 1300 134 237. If the reaction is serious, call 000 or go to your nearest emergency department.

## Chinese herbal medicine

**What it is:** Chinese herbs are a key part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). See pages 21–22 for more information on TCM.

**Why use it:** Herbs are given to unblock meridians, bring harmony between Yin and Yang, and restore organ function.

**What to expect:** The practitioner will take a case history and may do a tongue and pulse analysis 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 herbs to make their own formula, or they can dispense prepackaged herbal medicines. Herbs may be prescribed as tablets or as a blend of herbs that you make into a tea.

**Evidence:** As with Western herbal medicine, many Chinese herbs have been scientifically evaluated for use in the general population, with some positive results. Research has suggested that some Chinese herbs are worth exploring further, but there is no strong evidence that they stop cancer growing, spreading or recurring. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist and complementary medicine practitioner if you are thinking about using herbal preparations.

“ I don't know whether it was because I felt empowered or whether it was the remedies from my herbalist, but compared to other people I knew having the same type of conventional treatment, I felt I was faring pretty well. ” *Esther (breast cancer)*

## Safety of taking herbs during treatment

Many people believe herbs are safe simply because they are natural. This is not true. Taking the wrong dose, the wrong combination or using the wrong part of the plant may cause serious side effects or toxicity. Herbs can also cause harmful interactions when used with chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormone therapy. Ask your treatment team which herbs and supplements are suitable to take during cancer treatment.

**St John's wort** – This popular herb for mild to moderate depression has been shown to stop some chemotherapy drugs and other medications from working properly. It may also increase skin reactions to radiotherapy. If you are feeling depressed, ask your doctor about other treatments.

**Black cohosh** – Herbalists often prescribe this to menopausal women who are experiencing hot flashes. While

clinical trials show that black cohosh is relatively safe, it should not be used by people with liver damage. There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of black cohosh in people with cancer.

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

**Green tea** – This has been shown to stop the cancer drug bortezomib (Velcade®) from working properly.

Keep your complementary therapists and other health professionals informed about any herbal remedies you use before, during or after cancer treatment. Knowing all this information will help them give you the best possible care.



## Therapies based on diet

Many people with cancer who want to try complementary therapies decide to make nutritional changes. Some people want to alter 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 have their own specific approaches to diet. Most doctors, cancer nurses and dietitians recommend eating a balanced diet. However, for some people undergoing cancer treatment, this is not always possible. An accredited practising dietitian can work with you to ensure you are meeting your nutritional needs, give you tailored advice on your nutrition and coping with any eating problems you may experience, and assist in managing side effects. You can also call Cancer Council 13 11 20 for free information on eating well.



Some people with cancer choose Gerson therapy as an alternative treatment. Gerson therapy involves a special diet, including drinking fresh juice several times a day, taking supplements, and having coffee enemas. There is no scientific evidence that Gerson therapy is an effective treatment for cancer, and evidence shows that coffee enemas can be dangerous if used excessively.

**Benefits:** Good nutrition before, during and after treatment can help you to cope better with side effects, increase energy and maintain wellbeing. Vegetables and fruit contain not only vitamins and minerals, but also phytochemicals – natural substances such as antioxidants that may destroy cancer-causing agents (carcinogens).

Cancer Council recommends people with cancer follow the Australian Dietary Guidelines of two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables daily. Fruit and vegetables are best eaten fresh and whole rather than as a supplement or juice. Consuming a variety of both cooked and raw vegetables is recommended.

## Naturopathic nutrition

**What it is:** This is a broad field of health care and provides a particular focus on the foods you eat and how they affect your health and wellbeing. This approach generally promotes the use of whole foods, organic foods and certain food types.

**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, your body cannot function at its best and you may experience worse side effects from cancer treatment, develop new symptoms, or take longer to recover.

**What to expect:** A naturopathic nutritionist develops a treatment plan that is focused on creating diets from nutrient-rich food. You will be encouraged to avoid or minimise consumption of artificial flavours and chemicals. You may also be prescribed specific supplements.

**Evidence:** There is clinical evidence to show that eating a healthy, balanced diet can reduce people's cancer risk, and can help people recover from cancer treatment.

## Differences between nutritionists and dietitians

### Nutritionist

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.

### Dietitian

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

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. If your GP refers you to a dietitian as part of a Chronic Disease Management Plan, you may be eligible for a Medicare rebate.



## Other therapies

Homoeopathic remedies and flower essence remedies are not the same, but they are both diluted substances that contain no measurable amount of the original ingredient.

Scientists are unsure how homoeopathic and flower remedies affect the body. However, because the preparations are usually highly diluted, they do not appear to interact with drugs and are generally considered safe to use with conventional treatments.

**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 anxiety, insomnia, irritability or depression, as well as common ailments such as headache and muscle soreness.

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

### Homoeopathy

**What it is:** A system of health care based on the idea that ‘like cures like’. You are given a substance that causes similar symptoms in a healthy body to 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 that are diluted in water.

**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 suggest that homoeopathy may help ease menopausal symptoms of women with breast cancer. However, as these studies were relatively small and of low quality, the results can't be relied on.

See pages 13–14 for information about the regulation of medicines, including flower remedies and homoeopathy.



## Flower remedies

**What they are:** 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 Australian Bush Flower Essences®, developed in Australia in the 1980s.

**Why use them:** Flower remedies are used to balance the mind, body and spirit and help you cope with emotional problems, which can sometimes 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)



# Making treatment decisions

Sometimes it is difficult to decide on the type of treatment to have. You may feel that everything is happening too fast. Check with your doctor how soon your treatment should start, and take as much time as you can before making a decision.

Understanding the disease, the available treatments and possible side effects can help you weigh up the pros and cons of different treatments and make a well-informed decision that's based on your personal values. You may also want to discuss the options with your doctor, complementary health practitioner, friends and family.

You have the right to accept or refuse any treatment offered. Some people with more advanced cancer choose treatment even if it offers only a small benefit for a short period of time. Others want to make sure the benefits outweigh the side effects so they have the best possible quality of life.

Deciding whether to use complementary therapies and which ones to choose is a similar process to deciding on a course of conventional treatment. Some people with cancer may feel pressure from friends and family to use complementary therapies, and may feel guilty if the therapy they choose doesn't offer any benefit.

Some people will consider complementary therapies at the time of their diagnosis; others will not think about using them until later, perhaps as part of their supportive or palliative care.

Cancer Council warns against delaying or stopping conventional treatment in favour of an alternative therapy.

## Choosing complementary therapies

### Weigh up the different types of treatments

- ✓ Think about what you expect to gain from using complementary therapies.
- ✓ Consider the possible side effects of complementary therapies, how these might affect you, and how they may interact with your conventional treatments.
- ✓ Consider whether you prefer to use complementary therapies with strong scientific evidence, or whether anecdotal evidence is enough for you.
- ✓ Think about the costs of treatments (see pages 64–65).

### Find out more about different therapies

- ✓ Speak to your doctor, other health professionals 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 68).
- ✓ Contact a natural therapy association to find practitioners in your area or to verify their qualifications and experience (see pages 70–71).
- ✓ Borrow books on the topic from a library or read about therapies on recommended websites (see page 72).

### Discuss your concerns

- ✓ Talk to your practitioner or doctor about the therapies you would like to try, and if there are any potential interactions or side effects when they are used with your conventional treatments.
- ✓ Seek a second opinion if you are not happy with the information you are given.

## Finding a complementary therapist

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

### tips

- Confirm that the therapist is willing to communicate with your doctors about your treatment. This is particularly important if you see a practitioner who may use remedies that might interfere with conventional treatment.
- Check whether the therapist would like to see your test results, a list of medications you're taking, 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 changes 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 use the question checklist on pages 73–76.
- Take someone with you to appointments to offer support, get involved in the discussion, take notes or simply listen.
- See the glossary on pages 77–83 if there is a word you don't understand.

## Can I help myself or should I see a professional?

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

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

Some people may consider self-prescribing herbs or nutritional supplements. Although this may seem like a cheaper alternative, it may not be safe. The benefits of seeing a professional complementary therapist are that they:

- are qualified in the therapy or medicine you are considering
- have an objective view of your case
- have experience treating a range of conditions and may have treated other people with cancer
- are able to liaise with your clinicians, as necessary
- can prepare a tailor-made treatment plan and dispense remedies based on your individual needs, if they are qualified to do so
- can help you avoid the health risks of using complementary therapies that may interact with conventional cancer treatment.

Many websites offer a range of complementary medicines that may be less expensive than those you can purchase in Australia. However, the safety and quality regulations that apply to commercial products sold in Australia do not cover products purchased from overseas. See pages 13–14 for more information.

## Keeping your health care providers informed

It is important that 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 that most people with cancer who use complementary therapies don't discuss this with their primary health care providers because they worry their doctors will disapprove.

The use of complementary therapies to manage a range of health conditions is growing, so many primary health care providers are now 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 accurate information about them.

It is important to discuss your interest in complementary

therapies with your doctors and nurses, even if they aren't supportive of their use. It allows them to consider your safety and wellbeing.

For example, your surgeon, oncologist or radiotherapist may have specific concerns, such as not using particular creams or medicines at certain times during your treatment. If you are taking herbs or nutritional supplements, they may suggest you stop taking these before, during or after particular treatments.

To keep your doctors and nurses better informed, ask your complementary therapist to provide a letter outlining the type of therapy you are receiving.

It is also important to tell your complementary therapist that you have cancer, and advise them of the treatment you're having.

## 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 13 11 20. Talking it over can help you sort out the course of action that best suits 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 any complementary treatments you choose to have.

## Costs

Consultation costs for complementary therapies vary depending on the training and experience of the practitioner, the length of the consultation, and the treatment provided. The standard fee for a private complementary health practitioner is about \$80 to \$140 per hour, which does not include the cost of herbal remedies, essential oils, nutritional supplements or other products.

Naturopaths, herbalists and homoeopaths may dispense remedies that they mix for you, or they may sell you pre-made nutritional, herbal or homoeopathic supplements. Prices vary depending on the type of remedy and the ingredients, strength and quantity. Consider speaking to a few practitioners to compare costs.

If you have private health insurance, check whether you are eligible for a rebate on the cost of the consultation with a complementary therapist. Most funds do not provide a rebate on the cost of any remedies or supplements that you purchase. Some complementary therapies can be claimed under Medicare if you have a referral from your GP as part of a Chronic Disease Management Plan.

## Taking part in a clinical trial

Funding for clinical trials or research into the effectiveness and safety of complementary therapies is limited. Because of the growing popularity of complementary therapies in Australia, the National Institute of Complementary Medicine was established by the federal government to promote research in this area of health care.

Some universities and hospitals are also involved in research and clinical trials. Your hospital or support group may provide opportunities for you to take part in clinical trials and research involving the use of complementary therapies.

Before deciding whether or not to join a clinical trial, discuss the questions on the following page with your doctor and a qualified complementary therapies practitioner.

- What treatments are being tested and why?
- What tests are involved?
- Can I take part in the trial while 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 conventional cancer treatment, it is important to check whether using any complementary therapies could impact on the trial results. Speak to your doctor and/or complementary therapist for information.

If you decide to take part in a clinical trial, you can withdraw at any time. For more information, call Cancer Council 13 11 20 or visit [australiancancertrials.gov.au](http://australiancancertrials.gov.au).

“ I was on a clinical trial when I decided to see a naturopath, who suggested I take coconut oil. The doctor on the trial said it shouldn't have an impact on my other medication. ” *Alan (multiple myeloma)*



# Caring for someone with cancer

You may be reading this booklet because you are caring for someone with cancer. Being a carer can be stressful and cause you much 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.

A range of complementary therapies described in this booklet may also help carers cope with stress and fatigue.

Many cancer support groups and cancer education programs are open to carers, as well as people with cancer. Support groups and 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 [carersaustralia.com.au](http://carersaustralia.com.au) for more information and resources.

You can also call Cancer Council **13 11 20** to find out more about carers' services in your area and get a free copy of the *Caring for Someone with Cancer* booklet.





# Cancer Council services

Cancer Council offers a range of services to support people affected by cancer, their families and friends.

**Cancer Council 13 11 20** – This is many people's first point of contact if they have a cancer-related question. Trained professionals will answer any questions you have about your situation. For more information, see the inside back cover.

**Practical help** – Your local Cancer Council can help you access services or offer advice to manage the practical impact of a cancer diagnosis. This may include access to transport and accommodation, or legal and financial support. Call 13 11 20 to find out what is available in your state or territory.

**Support services** – You might find it helpful to share your experiences with other people affected by cancer. For some people, this means joining a support group. Others prefer to talk to a trained volunteer who has had a similar cancer experience.

Cancer Council can link you with others by phone, in person or online at [cancerconnections.com.au](http://cancerconnections.com.au). Call us to find out what services are available in your area.

**Life after cancer** – It's natural to feel a bit lost after finishing treatment. You might notice every ache or pain and worry that the cancer is coming back.

Cancer Council can provide support and information to people adjusting to life after cancer. Call 13 11 20 for more details.

**Printed, online and audiovisual resources** – There is a wide variety of free information available about cancer-related topics. Cancer Council produces easy-to-read booklets and fact sheets on more than 20 types of cancer, treatment, emotional issues and recovery.

Cancer Council publications are developed in consultation with health professionals and consumers. Content is reviewed regularly, according to best practice guidelines for health information.

### Related publications

You might also find the following free Cancer Council publications and audiovisual resources\* useful:

- *Emotions and Cancer*
- *Nutrition and Cancer*
- *Understanding Clinical Trials and Research*
- *Relaxation and Meditation CDs*
- *Caring for Someone with Cancer*
- *Living with Advanced Cancer*
- *Overcoming Cancer Pain*
- *Understanding Palliative Care*
- *Facing End of Life*
- *Living Well After Cancer*

Call **13 11 20** for copies, or download them from your local Cancer Council website.

\* *May not be available in all states and territories.*



# 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.

Association	Phone	Website
Association of Massage Therapists	02 9211 2441	amt.org.au
Australasian Integrative Medicine Association	02 8011 3358	aima.net.au
Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association	1300 725 334	acupuncture.org.au
Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association		anzata.org
Australian Association of Massage Therapists	1300 138 872	aamt.com.au
Australian Feldenkrais Guild	1800 001 550	feldenkrais.org.au
Australian Homoeopathic Association	07 4636 5081	homeopathyoz.org
Australian Hypnotherapists Association	1300 55 22 54	ahahypnotherapy.org.au
Australian Music Therapy Association	03 9525 9625	austmta.org.au
Australian Natural Therapists Association	1800 817 577	australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au
Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association	1800 422 885	anpa.asn.au

<b>Association</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Website</b>
Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique	<b>1300 788 540</b>	<a href="http://austat.org.au">austat.org.au</a>
Australian Traditional Medicine Society	<b>02 8878 1500</b>	<a href="http://atms.com.au">atms.com.au</a>
Bowen Therapists Federation of Australia	<b>1300 426 936</b>	<a href="http://bowen.asn.au">bowen.asn.au</a>
Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia	<b>03 9486 3077</b>	<a href="http://pacfa.org.au">pacfa.org.au</a>
Dietitians Association of Australia	<b>1800 812 942</b>	<a href="http://daa.asn.au">daa.asn.au</a>
International Aromatherapy and Aromatic Medicine Association		<a href="http://iaama.org.au">iaama.org.au</a>
Exercise & Sports Science Australia	<b>07 3862 4122</b>	<a href="http://essa.org.au">essa.org.au</a>
National Herbalists Association of Australia	<b>02 8765 0071</b>	<a href="http://nhaa.org.au">nhaa.org.au</a>
Reflexology Association of Australia	<b>1300 733 711</b>	<a href="http://reflexology.org.au">reflexology.org.au</a>
Reiki Australia	<b>1300 66 47 80</b>	<a href="http://reikiaustralia.com.au">reikiaustralia.com.au</a>
Yoga Australia	<b>1300 881 451</b>	<a href="http://yogaaustralia.org.au">yogaaustralia.org.au</a>



# Useful websites

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

## Australian

---

Cancer Council Australia.....	<b>cancer.org.au</b>
Cancer Australia.....	<b>canceraustralia.gov.au</b>
beyondblue.....	<b>beyondblue.org.au</b>
Cancer Connections.....	<b>cancerconnections.com.au</b>
Carers Australia.....	<b>carersaustralia.com.au</b>
Department of Health.....	<b>health.gov.au</b>
healthdirect Australia.....	<b>healthdirect.gov.au</b>
Therapeutic Goods Administration.....	<b>tga.gov.au</b>
Australasian Integrative Medicine Association.....	<b>aima.net.au</b>
The National Institute of Complementary Medicine.....	<b>nicm.edu.au</b>

## International

---

American Cancer Society.....	<b>cancer.org</b>
Macmillan Cancer Support.....	<b>macmillan.org.uk</b>
Cancer Research UK.....	<b>cancerresearchuk.org</b>
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.....	<b>mskcc.org</b>
CAM-Cancer.....	<b>cam-cancer.org</b>
National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.....	<b>nccih.nih.gov</b>
Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database.....	<b>naturaldatabase.therapeuticresearch.com</b>
Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine.....	<b>cam.cancer.gov/cam</b>
National Cancer Institute.....	<b>cancer.gov</b>



# Question checklist

You may find this checklist helpful when thinking about the questions you want to ask your complementary therapist.

## Things to consider before using complementary therapies

- What are the benefits?
- What is the scientific evidence to support its use?
- Will the therapy potentially harm me because of:
  - its side effects?
  - possible interaction with other medication?
  - the therapist's advice to stop or delay 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? How does it work?
- How long will it take to work?
- How can the therapies you practise help me?
- Are there any specific precautions I should take?
- 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 cancer treatment?
- Do you expect me to stop my conventional medication and treatments?

- Are you willing to liaise with my doctors or other health professionals I may need to see?
- How long should I use this therapy for? 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? Can I claim the cost on Medicare or from my health fund?
- What can I expect during a consultation?
- How many consultations do you recommend, and how often?
- Do you dispense your own medicines 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?
- Do you know whether the complementary medicines I am taking or wish to take will interfere with any of my treatments?
- 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?

## Questions to ask your doctor about specific therapies

### Mind–body techniques

- What type of therapist would you recommend for my concerns?
- Can you refer me to a psychologist or 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?
- 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?

### Nutritional therapies

- Are there any general dietary changes I should make?
- Should I eat organic foods?
- Are there any vitamin or mineral supplements that will help manage specific side effects caused by conventional treatment?
- Should I be taking any particular nutritional supplements?
- 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?
- What dosage should I take? Does it have side effects?
- 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 at the same time, or should I take it at a different time?

### **Flower remedies and homoeopathy**

- Do you think using flower remedies or homoeopathy would benefit me?
- Will I have any side effects from these remedies?



# Glossary

## **active exercise techniques**

Exercise techniques that require active participation to achieve benefits such as improving strength, wellbeing and quality of life, and decreasing stress.

## **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 (meridians) in the body to reduce symptoms of ill health.

## **Alexander technique**

A method of realigning posture.

## **alternative therapies**

Therapies that are used in place of conventional treatment, often in the hope they will provide a cure.

## **anecdotal evidence**

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

## **aromatherapy**

The use of essential oils extracted from plants to improve a person's mood, physical symptoms and general wellbeing.

## **art therapy**

The use of art to help people express their feelings.

## **Ayurvedic medicine**

A 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.

## **body-based practices (bodywork)**

A range of 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.

## **bush medicine**

Remedies and ways of healing used traditionally by Aboriginal people.

## **carbohydrate**

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

## **chemotherapy**

The use of 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.

**clinical trial**

A research study that tests new and better treatments to improve people's health.

**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.

**cognitive behaviour therapy**

A common type of counselling that helps people identify unhelpful thoughts and behaviours, and change how they respond to negative situations or emotions.

**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 issues by listening to them.

**dietary supplement**

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

**dietitian**

A university-qualified health professional who supports and educates people about nutrition and diet during treatment and recovery.

**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 field**

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. Also called qi.

**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/Gerson diet**

An alternative nutritional therapy based on pure fruit and vegetable juices and coffee enemas 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. 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 treatments that benefit people's physical, emotional, spiritual and practical needs.

**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 therapy**

A treatment that blocks the body's natural hormones that 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.

**infusion**

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

**integrative medicine**

The combined use of evidence-based complementary therapies and conventional medicine.

**interaction**

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

**life coaching**

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

**lifestyle factors**

Factors that help give a holistic (well-rounded) picture of your health and wellbeing. Factors 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.

### **lymph**

A clear fluid that circulates around the body through the lymphatic system, carrying cells that fight infection.

### **lymphatic drainage**

A type of specialised massage designed to stimulate the flow of lymph in tissues.

### **lymphatic system**

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

### **lymphoedema**

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

### **massage**

A bodywork therapy in which muscles are stimulated, stretched and relaxed through specialised pressure.

### **meditation**

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

### **meridian**

An invisible energy channel in the body. In traditional Chinese medicine, the body is believed to have meridians

through which energy flows to keep people balanced and healthy.

### **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.

### **mineral oil**

A highly processed and refined colourless and odourless oil used by some massage therapists.

### **minerals**

Components of food that are essential for the body, such as iron, zinc and calcium.

### **music therapy**

The use of music to improve health and wellbeing.

### **naturopathic nutrition**

A form of nutrition based on naturopathic principles of healthy eating. Specific foods are chosen to create a balanced diet. 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.

### **nutrition**

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

**oncologist**

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

**palliative care**

The holistic care of people who have a life-limiting illness, their families and carers. It aims to improve quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, spiritual, social and practical needs. It is not just for people who are about to die, although end-of-life care is a part of palliative care.

**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.

**phytochemicals**

Chemical compounds that occur naturally in fruit, vegetables, legumes (beans and peas) and grains. Also called phytonutrients.

**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**

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 the practitioner feels a person's pulse – 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 or injure cancer cells so they cannot grow and multiply.

**reflexology**

A type of bodywork involving the massage of nerve reflex points on the hands and 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.

### **resistance training (strength training)**

A type of exercise using free weights, weight machines, medicine balls, resistance bands or your own body weight to help strengthen muscles.

### **scientific evidence**

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

### **side effect**

Unintended effects of a drug, herb or other treatment.

### **spiritual practices**

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. Also called spirituality.

### **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 the practitioner's soothing touch calms the body by restoring 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 (conventional) 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**

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 touch therapies.

### **vitamins**

Essential substances found in food. The body needs vitamins 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 to address a range of 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 which focuses on breathing, stretching, strengthening and relaxation. There are many different types of yoga.

## Reference

1. B Oh et al., 'The use and perceived benefits resulting from the use of complementary and alternative medicine by cancer patients in Australia', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Clinical Oncology*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2010, pp. 342–49.

## Can't find a word here?

For more cancer-related words, visit:

- [cancercouncil.com.au/words](http://cancercouncil.com.au/words)
- [cancervic.org.au/glossary](http://cancervic.org.au/glossary)
- [cancersa.org.au/glossary](http://cancersa.org.au/glossary).



## 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 13 11 20

Being diagnosed with cancer can be overwhelming. At Cancer Council, we understand it isn't just about the treatment or prognosis. Having cancer affects the way you live, work and think. It can also affect our most important relationships.

When disruption and change happen in our lives, talking to someone who understands can make a big difference. Cancer Council has been providing information and support to people affected by cancer for over 50 years.

Calling 13 11 20 gives you access to trustworthy information that is relevant to you. Our cancer nurses are available to answer your questions and link you to services in your area, such as transport, accommodation and home help. We can also help with other matters, such as legal and financial advice.

If you are finding it hard to navigate through the health care system, or just need someone to listen to your immediate concerns, call 13 11 20 and find out how we can support you, your family and friends.

Cancer Council services and programs vary in each area.

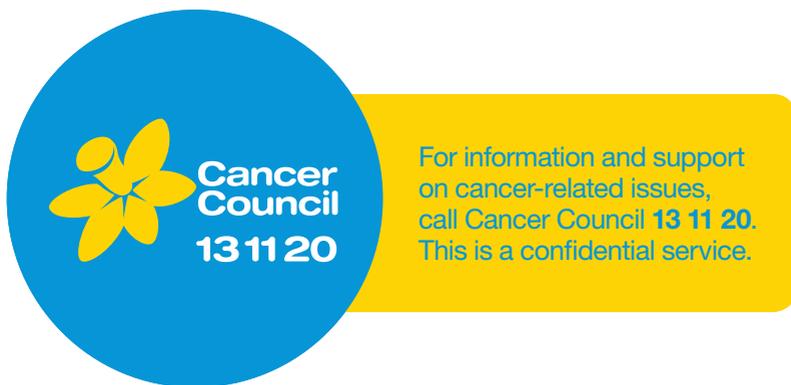
13 11 20 is charged at a local call rate throughout Australia (except from mobiles).



**If you need information in a language other than English, an interpreting service is available. Call 13 14 50.**



**If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service.**  
[www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)



## Visit your local Cancer Council website

**Cancer Council ACT**  
actcancer.org

**Cancer Council NSW**  
cancercouncil.com.au

**Cancer Council NT**  
nt.cancer.org.au

**Cancer Council Queensland**  
cancerqld.org.au

**Cancer Council SA**  
cancersa.org.au

**Cancer Council Tasmania**  
cancertas.org.au

**Cancer Council Victoria**  
cancervic.org.au

**Cancer Council WA**  
cancerwa.asn.au

**Cancer Council Australia**  
cancer.org.au

*This booklet is funded through the generosity of the people of Australia.  
To support Cancer Council, call your local Cancer Council or visit your local website.*