

Understanding

Cancer and Complementary Therapies

Caring for people with cancer

Understanding

Cancer and complementary therapies

This booklet has been written to help you to understand more about cancer and complementary therapies. It has been prepared and checked by medical doctors, complementary therapists, other relevant specialists, nurses and patients. The information in this booklet is an agreed view on the benefits and risks of complementary therapies for patients with cancer. You can make a note below of the contact names and information that you may need.

>>>	Name	Telephone
	Specialist nurse	
	Family doctor (GP)	
	Surgeon	
	Medical oncologist	
	Medical social worker	
	Dietitian	

This booklet has been produced by the Irish Cancer Society to meet the need for improved communication, information and support for cancer patients and their families throughout diagnosis and treatment. We would like to thank all those patients, families and professionals whose support and advice made this publication possible. We especially thank the people who generously shared their personal experiences in this booklet. We also acknowledge the contribution of the many consultants, nurses and other healthcare professionals and complementary therapists who so kindly gave up their time and expertise to contribute to previous editions of this booklet.

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This booklet offers information only and does not replace medical advice. The inclusion of any complementary or alternative therapy does not mean it is endorsed by the Irish Cancer Society. All therapies as described in the booklet should be used with caution by cancer patients, and only after talking to their doctor.

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Quick facts

What are complementary therapies?

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Complementary therapies are treatments and activities that you can have along with your standard medical treatment to try and feel better. For example, massage, counselling and acupuncture.

Will complementary therapies help me?

Page 8 ▶▶

Some people say that certain complementary therapies can help them to feel more relaxed and better able to cope with their cancer and the side-effects of treatment. Complementary therapies can't treat or cure cancer.

What's the difference between complementary and alternative therapies?

Page 10 ▶▶

Complementary therapies are used together with standard medical treatment. Alternative therapies are used instead of standard medical care.

Does the Irish Cancer Society support alternative therapies?

Page 6 ▶▶

We don't support using alternative therapies. There's no scientific proof that they work and, more importantly, they may not be safe. Standard medical treatments are now very effective at controlling and often curing cancer, and side-effects are better managed now. Choosing an unproven alternative may mean you miss out on a standard treatment that may help you.

I don't like the idea of putting chemicals into my body. Should I try a 'natural' alternative?

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Natural doesn't mean safe. Using a product that hasn't been through proper clinical trials can be dangerous. Doctors use standard treatments like surgery and chemotherapy because they have been scientifically proven as the best and most effective treatments against cancer. 'Natural' products like plants and herbs may have serious side-effects, damage your health or cause dangerous interactions with other medications.

Where can I find out more?

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It's very important to talk to your doctor if you're thinking of using complementary or alternative therapies. You can also talk to one of our cancer nurses by calling our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or by visiting a Daffodil Centre. There are some helpful websites on page 33.

We're here for you

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If you or your family have any questions or worries, want to know where to get support, or if you just need to talk, you can talk to one of our cancer nurses.

Ways to get in touch

- Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700
- Drop in to a Daffodil Centre
- Email us: cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie

See page 40 for more about our services.

Introduction

Complementary and alternative therapies are products and activities that are not part of standard (conventional) medical care. These can range from relaxation techniques and physical therapies to herbal products, vitamins and special diets.

This booklet has been written to help you to understand more about:

- The difference between complementary and alternative therapies
- Types of therapies you might hear about
- Their benefits to cancer patients, and any risks

The Irish Cancer Society believes that in some cases complementary therapies – used **together with** conventional, evidence-based treatment – can help people cope with the symptoms of disease and its treatment, aid relaxation, and reduce tension and anxiety.

Many of our affiliated cancer support centres across the country provide a range of complementary therapies for cancer patients.

The Society does not advocate the use of alternative therapies. If a patient is planning to start an alternative medicine or treatment, it is vital that they discuss this with their doctor.

The Society welcomes more scientific research into complementary and alternative therapies. This will help patients to make informed decisions about their care and support health professionals to give the best advice to their patients about therapies that are helpful and safe.

The Society asks those who have any questions about any type of cancer treatment or therapy to discuss them with their doctor. You can also call our Cancer Nurseline on Freephone 1800 200 700 or drop into a Daffodil Centre in one of 13 hospitals nationwide.

Standard, complementary and alternative – what's the difference?

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Standard (conventional) treatments

These are the treatments normally used in hospitals. For example, surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy and targeted therapies.

Why do people use standard treatments?

- Standard medical treatments have been thoroughly researched and tested to prove that they work and are safe to use for humans.
- They cure many cancers and help people to live longer and to manage side-effects better.
- Doctors understand how these treatments work and know which dose works best.
- Doctors understand the different possible side-effects of each treatment and how likely they are to happen.

More people than ever are surviving cancer, thanks to cancer research finding new and improved treatments. Standard treatments don't cure everyone's cancer, but they are effective for very many people.

Complementary therapies

These are therapies that can be used **together with** standard medical treatment to help people feel better emotionally and to manage side-effects and symptoms. For example, meditation, massage, aromatherapy and acupuncture.

Why do people use complementary therapies?

Different complementary therapies can help some patients to feel better mentally and physically, both during treatment and afterwards. They may:

- Help you to feel more relaxed
- Reduce anxiety, stress, tension and depression
- Reduce symptoms like pain, nausea, breathlessness or fatigue

- Help you to feel more in control of your illness and more hopeful or positive
- Give you a sense of comfort and wellbeing, as they often focus on caring for the whole person, not just the disease or symptom.

>>> Complementary therapies are not meant to replace standard treatments or cure cancer.

Here are some therapies that people have found helpful, alongside their standard treatment:

Anxiety	Hypnosis, massage, yoga, meditation, relaxation techniques, mindfulness
Fatigue	Exercise, massage, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, yoga
Nausea and vomiting	Acupuncture, aromatherapy, massage, hypnosis, music therapy
Pain	Acupuncture, aromatherapy, hypnosis, massage, music therapy
Sleep problems	Exercise, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, yoga
Stress	Aromatherapy, exercise, hypnosis, massage, meditation, tai chi, yoga

Integrative care

Integrative care means combining (integrating) your standard cancer treatment with complementary therapies to try to feel as well as possible and to cope better with your cancer.

Alternative therapies

These are therapies that are used **instead of** standard treatment. For example, ‘anti-cancer’ diets and herbal preparations. Some alternative therapies claim to treat or cure cancer, but while some people may say they are helpful, there is no scientific evidence that they have any benefit.

Why do people use alternative therapies?

- Some people believe that chemotherapy drugs and other standard treatments are ‘toxic’ or damaging to the body and prefer to use what they think are ‘natural’ therapies.
- Not all information about alternative therapies is reliable, so people may be confused or mistaken about the benefits of an alternative therapy.
- Some alternative therapies claim that they work better than standard treatments, and so can offer hope to people. This can be especially attractive to someone with advanced cancer, if standard treatment isn’t controlling their cancer any more.
- Some people feel that hospital-based medicine doesn’t focus on their spiritual and emotional well-being, and that an alternative approach is more personal and less clinical.
- A cancer diagnosis can turn a person’s world upside down. Making a choice about treatment can give a sense of control at this difficult time. The key is to make the right informed choice.
- Some alternative treatments are part of a person’s culture. For example, Chinese traditional medicine.

Be careful about putting your faith in a therapy without scientific proof that it works. It may:

- Have no effect at all, which may be very disappointing or upsetting if you had put your faith in it
- Damage your health
- Stop other treatments from working

- Cost you a lot of money
- Affect your family life
- Leave you without support and follow-up care, especially if you are travelling for alternative treatment

Remember: Delaying standard treatment for cancer can make it much harder to treat. It can also make a curable cancer incurable.

Will it help? Is it safe?

You have the right to decide on your own treatment and care, but it’s very important to make sure your decision is based on scientific research evidence and facts. The two main questions to ask are:

- Will it help?
- Is it safe?

Your doctors can give you advice about this – it’s their job to do the very best for you.

Our nurses are also here to support you if you have any questions about standard cancer treatments or complementary or alternative therapies. Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or drop into a Daffodil Centre.

Remember that standard treatments have been through all kinds of trials and tests before they can be used. This is not true for alternative therapies. You may miss out on a treatment that could really help you if you refuse standard treatment.



Choosing complementary therapies

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Talking to your doctor or cancer nurse

Your cancer nurses and doctors know about your treatment, your health and any medications you're taking, so always check with them before trying a complementary therapy.

Many complementary therapies are safe, but some therapies can interact with cancer treatments or may not be suitable if you have any other health conditions, even if you used them without problems before your diagnosis. For example, acupuncture may not be safe to use if you have a low white blood cell count and some vitamins and herbs can interact with cancer treatments. Your doctor or nurse can recommend therapies that are safe and helpful for you.



Hints and tips: Talking to your medical team



- Talk to your oncology doctor or specialist nurse if you have a question about a particular therapy.
- Ask if they can recommend any complementary therapies that might be safe and useful for you.
- Ask your doctor or nurse to suggest a therapist, or speak with a healthcare professional who knows about the therapy in question.
- Tell your doctor about any therapies you have used before or are currently using.
- Show your doctor, nurse or pharmacist any tablets, remedies or herbal or vitamin supplements you are taking, even things that aren't related to your cancer. Bring them with you when visiting the hospital, surgery or pharmacy, even if you have used them safely in the past or think they are harmless.

Choosing a complementary therapist

Complementary therapies are not regulated in Ireland. Some therapists have a lot of training and experience whereas others have very little, so it's worth doing a bit of research to find a good therapist.

- Ask at the hospital or your local cancer support centre for advice and recommendations. See page 42 for more about cancer support centres.
- Contact the professional organisation of the therapy in question to get the names of practitioners who are certified and registered.
- Find out what a practitioner needs to do to be accepted as a member of the professional organisation. For example:
 - Do they need certain professional qualifications, for example a diploma?
 - Do they have to have a certain number of hours' experience?
 - Do they need to have insurance?
 - Have they signed up to a professional code of conduct and / or complaints procedure?
- Ask the practitioner about their training and experience, including if they have any experience with cancer patients.
- Choose a therapist who will work together with your doctors and your hospital treatment plan. Many cancer support centres ask for a letter from your cancer specialist or have a simple form for them to fill in before they start giving any complementary therapies, so that they can check that the therapy is suitable for you.

Don't overpay

Be sure that you're paying a fair price for the therapy or product. Some can be very expensive.

- If there's a professional organisation for the therapy you're interested in, you could ask them roughly what you should be charged.
- Many cancer support centres have free or reduced-price complementary therapy sessions.
- Check with your health insurance company or the Health Service Executive (HSE) if they cover the therapy in question.

Need more help?

Talk to one of our cancer nurses. Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700, or drop into a Daffodil Centre.

Talking to therapists

On your first visit to a therapist, expect them to ask about your full medical history, including:

- Any past illnesses
- Your current state of health and information about your diagnosis
- Any treatments that you are currently having or had in the past
- Any medications or supplements you're taking
- Any allergies you have



Hints and tips: Staying safe

Safe therapists will not:

- Claim they can cure your cancer
- Tell you to stop seeing your doctor or other people caring for you
- Tell you to stop taking your medicine or change your standard treatment
- Tell you to stop your standard cancer treatment, for example chemotherapy
- Charge you a lot of money

Email: cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie

Cancer support centres

If you are interested in trying complementary therapies during or after your cancer treatment, you could visit your local cancer support centre. Our affiliated cancer support centres provide a range of services for cancer patients and their families.

“The Centre has played a huge part in my road to recovery.”

Many centres offer therapies free of charge. For example:

- Acupuncture
- Reflexology
- Bio-energy healing
- Massage
- Reiki
- Art therapy
- Relaxation
- Exercise classes
- Yoga

Free one-to-one counselling is also available, to patients and their families.

Not all therapies are available in all centres, so call into your nearest one and see what's available. If you need help finding support in your area, call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. There's a list of affiliated cancer support centres on our website, www.cancer.ie/support/support-in-your-area/directory

“I find the centre so supporting and comforting... The amount of services they provide is fantastic. I was so afraid going in at the beginning but now it's my second home.”



Types of complementary therapies

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Counselling and self-help methods

Talking with a trained professional like a counsellor or to other people in a similar situation may help you to manage your feelings, such as anxiety, anger and sadness. You may also feel more supported and less alone. It can also help you to learn ways to cope emotionally and practically with your diagnosis.

Examples of counselling methods

- **Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT):** With CBT a therapist will help you to learn new ways of thinking and behaving that can improve your coping skills and help you to manage stress, anxiety and depression.
- **Psychotherapy:** Psychotherapy is a talking therapy where a trained psychotherapist will help you to understand any problems you're having and find ways to cope.

Self-help and support methods

- **Support groups:** Support groups bring people together so that they can share experiences and advice and support each other. Support groups may be run by a professional such as counsellor or nurse, or by the group members. Research has shown that people with cancer in support groups found it improved their mood, helped them to cope better with day-to-day challenges, and reduced their pain.

🗨️ I found counselling wonderful, to be able to discuss my thoughts and fears ... getting the tools to help me deal with my anxiety when it strikes, e.g. waiting on scan results. It makes you feel safe and less alone. It has given me hope for the future. I am very happy and content for the moment, even though I have to live with this. It's how I cope. 🗨️

Tips

If you're interested in counselling or self-help, take time to find what suits you best. If a particular counsellor or support group doesn't suit you, try something else.

Find out more

- Ask one of our cancer nurses for advice on types of therapies and how to find services near you. Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to talk to a cancer nurse.
- Many cancer support centres have support groups and free one-to-one counselling funded by the Irish Cancer Society.
- Talk to the specialist nurse or medical social worker at the hospital. Ask if your hospital has a psycho-oncology service. This is a team of experts who give emotional and psychological care to people with cancer.

🗨️ Friendship and support of others is hugely beneficial ... to my overall wellbeing. It brought the realisation that I could live life fully and happily. 🗨️

Exercise-based therapies

Exercise is one of the most effective therapies for people with cancer, both for physical and mental health. Exercise has been proven to improve some cancer-related symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety and depression.

Research suggests that being physically active, along with eating a healthy diet, can increase cancer survival rates and help to reduce the risk of some cancers coming back after treatment.

Examples of exercise-based methods:

- **Walking:** A regular 30-minute walk can increase fitness, improve heart and bone health, help you to stay a healthy weight and lift your mood.

- **Pilates:** Pilates involves small, controlled movements and breathing exercises that aim to increase strength, flexibility and balance, as well as helping you to relax.
- **Yoga:** Yoga is a system of stretches and poses that can increase flexibility, stamina and strength. It also focuses on breathing and meditation to help you to relax, sleep better and feel less stressed. It may also help with fatigue during treatment.

Tips

- Most people will benefit from exercise, but discuss your exercise plans with your doctor or nurse before continuing or starting any form of exercise.
- Taking part in an organised group activity can give you support and company, as well as the physical benefits.

Find out more

- Ask at the hospital or your local cancer support centre for information on special exercise programmes for people with cancer.
- Many cancer support centres offer groups and classes for various exercise-based therapies.
- Ask our cancer nurses about the Strides for Life walking groups or other exercise programmes. Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or go to a Daffodil Centre to find out more.

Strides for Life

Strides for Life is a 15-week group walking programme for people who have had a cancer diagnosis, based on the Murphy Cardiovascular METs programme.

It aims to help people to get active and improve their overall health and well-being. It is designed to suit each individual participant's fitness level, gradually increasing the workload every week over the 15 weeks.

What people say about *Strides for Life*

- 👉 Amazing ... Love *Strides for Life*. I look forward to it every week. Met so many friends. You're never alone. Now I go out walking most days, do yoga and keep fit. I can honestly say it's my life saver. 🙏
- 👉 It's good to walk with people who are going through similar cancer journeys. It has improved my fitness, so I feel better able to cope if I have a procedure. 🙏
- 👉 We exercised in a fun and friendly atmosphere. I loved meeting all the other group members, having the chat and sharing tips ... Lots of support to help ourselves get better. I improved my fitness and it helped me regain my confidence. 🙏



Massage therapies

Massage therapies involve rubbing, tapping or pressing the muscles or soft tissues of the body. These types of therapies may help you to relax and feel better in yourself. Massage may also help reduce stiffness and pain, help you to sleep better and improve fatigue.

Most massage therapists who have specialised training to give massage to patients with a cancer diagnosis will ask you for a signed consent form from your doctor to say that it is safe for you to have a massage.

>>> Massage will not cause cancer to spread.

Examples of massage therapies

- **Aromatherapy massage:** This involves massaging with essential oils from plants. Certain oils may have particular benefits. For example, lavender oil is said to be relaxing.
- **Shiatsu:** This involves applying pressure on points of the body using thumbs and gentle stretches. It may help to relieve tension or stress and improve fatigue.
- **Reflexology:** Applying pressure to points on the hands and feet. It may help to lift your mood or help you to cope with pain, stress and anxiety.

Tips

- Tell your massage therapist about your cancer and any treatment you have had. Not all types of massage are suitable for cancer patients. For example, deep tissue and Swedish massage are too vigorous for people with cancer.
- Avoid massage immediately after chemotherapy or radiotherapy and in the area of recent surgery or over a known tumour site.

6 Massage can be a way of relaxing and taking time out. There are many benefits such as helping with nausea, constipation, bone and muscle pain. 9

Mind-body and spiritual approaches

Mind-body methods are based on the belief that the mind can affect the body. Some mind-body methods may help you to feel more relaxed and better able to cope with your illness and treatment.

Examples of mind-body methods

- **Meditation:** Involves techniques such as focused breathing or repetition of words to calm your mind and help you to enter a state of stillness and deep relaxation.
- **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness means being aware and present in each moment. Mindfulness is a type of meditation that focuses your mind in the present to reduce anxiety and improve mental wellbeing.
- **Relaxation techniques:** Breathing and muscle relaxation exercises to reduce stress, increase wellbeing and improve blood pressure and muscle tension.

Find out more

- Many cancer support centres have classes where you can learn and practise these techniques.
- You can ask one of our cancer nurses for advice on types of therapies and how to find services near you. Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to talk to a cancer nurse.

Prayer or therapies focusing on spiritual feelings or beliefs can help some people to cope better. Spirituality may give a sense of peace or purpose, connection with others and help a person to make sense of their illness.



Cancer Nurseline Freephone 1800 200 700

Creative therapies

Creative therapies may boost your self-esteem and help you to release negative emotions, relax and feel more positive.

Examples of creative therapies

- **Art therapy:** Using paint, sculpture, drawing or art appreciation to explore and express your feelings. It can be done in groups or individually.
- **Creative writing:** Writing can help you to find your voice, express your creativity and explore your emotions in a safe, supportive environment.
- **Music therapy:** Listening, playing or singing may calm your mind and body, improve your mood and reduce pain and anxiety.

Tips

- Make sure the therapist is well qualified, so that they can help you manage any strong emotions you may have during the session.
- If you don't want to visit a therapist or group session, you may still benefit from writing a diary, listening to music or creating art at home.

Find out more

- Many cancer support centres have classes where you can learn and practise these techniques.



Energy therapies

These therapies are based on the belief that the body has energy fields that can be used to promote wellbeing. There's evidence that some of these therapies may help you to feel better in yourself or improve some of the side-effects of cancer and its treatment. There's no evidence that they can treat or cure cancer.

Examples of energy therapies

- **Acupuncture:** This involves puncturing the skin with tiny, hair-thin needles, which are left in place for a few minutes then removed. Acupuncture may help symptoms like pain, insomnia, fatigue, dry mouth, breathlessness, feeling sick and hot flushes. It may also help to reduce anxiety and help you feel more relaxed.
- **Reiki:** Reiki ('ray-key') involves a practitioner placing their hands in a series of positions on or over your body using gentle strokes or touches. There is no scientific evidence to prove that Reiki can treat or cure cancer, but it may help to reduce stress and pain, help you to feel more relaxed and improve your mood.
- **Qi-gong:** Qi-gong combines movement, meditation and breathing exercises. It may help you to feel less stressed and better in yourself. It may also help with symptoms such as pain, fatigue and nausea.

Tip

- Acupuncture is not suitable for everyone, for example people with a low white blood cell or platelet count.

Find out more

- Call our Cancer Nurseline or visit a Daffodil Centre for advice on finding a reputable practitioner.
- Many cancer support centres run free energy therapy sessions, e.g. reiki. See our website www.cancer.ie/support to find a centre near to you.

Diet and nutrition

A healthy diet with a good balance of protein, carbohydrate, fats, vitamins and minerals is an important part of feeling as well as possible after a cancer diagnosis. A well-balanced diet can:

- Keep up your energy and strength
- Help your body to cope with treatment and any side-effects
- Reduce your risk of infection
- Help you to heal and recover better

If your diet isn't balanced or you cut out certain foods, it can make you feel more unwell or increase side-effects or symptoms.

Did you know?

- Protein is very important for healing after surgery
- Iron is important for red blood cell production
- Calcium and vitamin D are needed for healthy bones

What's the best diet for me?

The best diet for you depends on your general health, the type of diet you normally prefer, the type of treatment you're having and if you're having any side-effects or symptoms.

For example, after stomach surgery you may need a special diet to make sure you get enough calories. If you're finding it hard to swallow you may need a soft diet.

Tips

Some foods can interfere with cancer treatments. For example, grapefruit juice interacts with many medications. Your doctor or pharmacist can give you more advice on possible interactions and foods that should be avoided with your medicine.

Can diet cure cancer?

Because diet is linked to an increased risk of some cancers, some people believe that diet can treat or cure cancer. Even if diet plays a part in a cancer developing, there is no scientific evidence that any food or diet can reverse the disease or cure cancer.

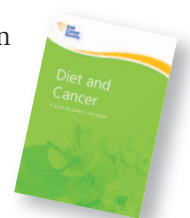


Hints and tips: Vitamins and minerals

- Vitamins and minerals are important for your health, so try to have a varied, balanced diet that will give you vitamins, minerals and plant substances (phytochemicals). Fresh vegetables and fruit are good sources of phytochemicals.
- You may think vitamins are harmless, but large amounts of vitamins or minerals can be harmful or interfere with your treatment, so be careful. For example:
 - Too much vitamin A can cause liver or bone damage.
 - Taking vitamin C supplements may interfere with radiotherapy and some chemotherapy drugs and lessen their effect.
- If you have cancer, don't take supplements unless your doctor tells you to.

Find out more

- Ask to talk to the dietitian at the hospital if you have any questions or want advice on eating the best diet possible.
- Our booklet *Diet and Cancer* has lots of advice on diet in general and specific diets and recipes for different eating problems. Download or order it from our website www.cancer.ie/publications. You can also get a copy from a Daffodil Centre or by calling our Cancer Nurseline.
- Get advice from one of our cancer nurses. Call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.
- If you want to find a dietitian, go to the website of the Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute, www.indi.ie



Dietitian or nutritionist? Getting the best advice

The best person to advise you on your diet is a dietitian. Dietitians are fully qualified and regulated healthcare professionals. Nutritionists or nutritional therapists may have far less training and they are not regulated, so you may get very different advice, depending on which nutritionist you speak to.

Herbs and plant extracts

Many herbs and other plants have proven effects on the human body – some helpful and some harmful. You may also read false claims made about the power of certain plants to treat or cure cancer.

If you have cancer, it's important to be very careful with herbal products and plant extracts. The active ingredients can have unpredictable and harmful effects, and they may interact with your medication. It's very important to talk to your doctor if you're thinking about taking any herbs or plant extracts during your cancer treatment.



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- Information about complementary & alternative therapies 33
- What does that word mean? 34

Making sense of health claims

It can be hard to make sense of information about complementary and alternative therapies. Sometimes you may read how a particular therapy helped a person, or see what seems to be very convincing evidence about a miracle cure.

Here are some things to watch out for:

Personal experiences: Using patient stories as ‘proof’ for the therapy, rather than scientific research studies. This is a sign that there may not be much real scientific evidence behind the claims being made.

Describing the therapy as a cure for cancer: The only treatments that have been scientifically proven to cure cancer are conventional treatments like surgery.

Check on respected cancer organisations’ websites to see if there's any evidence to back up the claims being made.

Exaggerating the benefits: There may be scientific research to prove that a therapy has a particular effect – for example, it may reduce swelling, have antioxidant effects or speed up healing. But this doesn’t mean that it can cure or control cancer.

Read carefully to see what the **proven** effects of a therapy are and check that this matches the benefits it claims to have.

Laboratory or animal studies: Sometimes you may read about a therapy killing cancer cells in a laboratory or working on animals like rats or mice. Sometimes when these therapies are tested in humans they prove to be useful, but other times the beneficial effect doesn’t happen with humans.

Unless a therapy has gone through human trials, there’s no way of knowing if it will be helpful or not.

Selling products or information relating to the therapy: If a webpage is making money from selling products or treatments, there’s more reason for them to exaggerate the benefits or give misleading or incomplete information.

How to check out health claims

- Talk to your doctor.
- Use independent, reliable websites, like cancer organisations’ and government health websites for information. Some are listed below.
- Find out about the website – do they have contact details, information about the qualifications of the person writing the information or any sponsors?

Information about complementary and alternative therapies

There is a lot of information available on complementary and alternative therapies, so it’s important to use reliable, trusted sources.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Cancer

www.cam-cancer.org: Summaries of the benefits and risks of different therapies, based on research evidence.

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, About Herbs, Botanicals and Other Products

www.mskcc.org: Large database of herbs, plants and other products and treatments, with evidence-based information on their:

- Uses
- Benefits
- Risks
- Known interactions with other herbs or medicines

Cancer Research UK

www.cruk.org: General information on complementary therapies and information on selected individual therapies, based on research evidence.

What does that word mean?

Alternative therapies	Therapies used instead of conventional medicine.
Anecdotal evidence	Information passed by word-of-mouth but not recorded scientifically, such as personal stories.
Antioxidants	Chemicals such as vitamins, enzymes and minerals which protect your body from other chemicals called free radicals that cause cell damage. Antioxidants are found in foods such as berries, broccoli, tomatoes, red grapes, garlic, spinach, tea and carrots. Well-known antioxidants include vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E. See also free radicals.
Bodywork	A term that refers to therapies such as massage and deep tissue manipulation that aim to improve the structure and working of your body.
CAM	Complementary and alternative medicine.
Chemotherapy	A treatment to cure or control cancer using drugs.
Complementary therapies	A way of promoting health and well-being using therapies that can be used alongside conventional medicine.
Conventional medicine	A way of treating people based on scientific evidence.
Eastern medicine	A broad term for therapies that began in Asian countries like China, Tibet, Japan, India and Thailand. These therapies are generally not based on scientific evidence but have been used for centuries.

Essential oil	An oily liquid that is taken from some plants by distillation or cold pressing. The word essential refers to the fragrant essence of the plant.
Free radicals	Highly reactive chemicals that often contain oxygen or nitrogen. They are formed naturally in your body as a byproduct of chemical reactions. Because they can cause cell damage they are linked to cancer.
Holistic	An approach to health that considers the whole body and environment when offering treatment. It focuses on the mind, body and spirit of a person rather than on the body and disease only.
Home remedy	Foods or common household items that are used to treat an illness or ailment. Usually it arises from tradition or habit.
Integrative medicine	This combines conventional medicine with complementary therapies.
Metabolism	All the chemical changes that take place in your body. These occur when food is taken in to make energy and allow your body to grow.
Natural products	Chemicals that occur in nature that can be used as medicines. This does not mean that they are safe but that they are found in nature.
Orthodox medicine	Another name for conventional or standard medicine.
Physiotherapy	The use of physical means – massage, exercise, heat or electricity – to relieve pain, restore movement and muscle strength. It is based on medical science and part of conventional medicine.

Physical therapy	Another name for physiotherapy (especially in the USA).
Placebo effect	Something positive that occurs when you are given a harmless substance with no active ingredient. For example, as a pill, liquid, powder or injection. It produces an effect, not due to the drug or therapy, but because you expect something positive will happen. It includes the power of suggestion.
Practitioner	A person who performs conventional, complementary or alternative therapies.
Radiotherapy	A treatment for cancer using high-energy X-rays.
Standard medicine	Another name for conventional medicine.
Therapist	A person skilled in a particular type of therapy.
Traditional medicine	This term can have two meanings. (1) Medical techniques developed and used before the age of modern medicine. These can include herbal medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine and homeopathy. (2) The term is sometimes used to describe modern medicine, especially by those offering alternative therapies.
Wellness care	Another name for complementary therapies.
Western medicine	Usually refers to therapies that began and developed in Europe and North America, and which are based on scientific evidence.

Support resources

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Coping with the financial impact of cancer

A diagnosis of cancer often means that you will have extra expenses, like car parking during hospital visits, medication, travel, heating and childcare costs. If you can't work or you are unemployed, this may cause even more stress. It may be harder for you to deal with cancer if you are worried about money.

Medical expenses

Medical expenses that you might have to pay include:

- Visits to your family doctor (GP)
- Medicines
- Visits to hospital
- Appliances, like wigs
- Overnight stays in hospital

How much you pay towards your medical expenses depends on whether or not you qualify for a medical card and what type of health insurance you have, if any.

If you have a medical card, you will probably have very little to pay for hospital and GP (family doctor) care or your medication. If you are over 70 years old, you can get a free GP visit card.

Medical cards are usually for people on low incomes, but sometimes a card can be given even if your income is above the limit. For example, if you have a large amount of medical expenses. This is known as a discretionary medical card.

An emergency medical card may be issued if you are terminally ill and in palliative care, irrespective of your income.

If you do not have a medical card you will have to pay some of the cost of your care and medication.

If you have health insurance the insurance company will pay some of the costs, but the amount will depend on your insurance plan. It's important to contact your insurance company before starting treatment.

Benefits and allowances

There are benefits available from the Department of Social Protection that can help people who are ill and their family. For example, Illness

Benefit, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Leave.

If you want more information on benefits and allowances, contact:

- The medical social worker in the hospital you are attending
- Citizens Information – Tel: 0761 074 000
- Department of Social Protection (DSP) – Tel: 1890 662 244 or ask to speak to a DSP representative at your local health centre or DSP office.

Always have your PPS number to hand when you are asking about entitlements and benefits. It's also a good idea to photocopy completed forms before posting them.

If you have financial difficulties

If you are getting into debt or you are in debt, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can help you. MABS can look at your situation, work out your budget, help you to deal with your debts and manage your payments. The service is free and confidential. Call the MABS Helpline 0761 07 2000 for information.

If you are finding it hard to cope financially, contact your medical social worker in the hospital or your local health centre for advice. The Irish Cancer Society can also give some help towards travel costs in certain cases. See page 41 for more details of our Volunteer Driver Service and the Travel2Care fund.

You can also call our Cancer Nurseline 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre and the nurse will suggest ways to help you manage.

More information

For more information go to www.cancer.ie/publications and check out our booklet, *Managing the Financial Impact of Cancer – A Guide for Patients and their Families*. This explains:

- Medical costs and help available
- Benefits and allowances that you or your family may qualify for
- Travel services
- Ways to cope with the cost of cancer



The booklet also has lots of other information to help you manage the cost of cancer. For example, disability and mobility supports, help for people in financial difficulty, help for carers and living at home and nursing home supports.

Irish Cancer Society services

Our Cancer Support Department provides a range of cancer support services for people with cancer, at home and in hospital, including:

- Cancer Nurseline
- Daffodil Centres
- Survivor Support
- Support in your area
- Patient travel and financial support services
- Night nursing
- Publications and website information

- Our **Cancer Nurseline Freephone 1800 200 700**. Call our Cancer Nurseline and speak to one of our cancer nurses for confidential advice, support and information. You can also email us on cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie or visit our Online Community at **www.cancer.ie**
For the deaf community, our Cancer Nurseline is using the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) using IRIS. Contact IRIS by text 087 980 6996 or email: remote@slis.ie
- Our **Daffodil Centres**. Visit our Daffodil Centres, located in thirteen hospitals nationwide. The centres are staffed by cancer nurses and trained volunteers who provide confidential advice, support and information to anyone concerned about or affected by cancer.
- Our **Survivor Support**. Speak to someone who has been through a cancer diagnosis. Our trained volunteers are available to provide emotional and practical support to anyone going through or finished with their treatment.
- **Support in your area**. We work with cancer support groups and centres across the country to ensure cancer patients have access to confidential support including counselling. See page 42 for more information.

- **Patient travel and financial support services**. We provide practical and financial support for patients in need, travelling to and from their cancer appointments. There are two services available through the Society:
 - **Travel2Care** is a limited fund, made available by the National Cancer Control Programme, for patients who are having difficulty getting to and from their treatments while attending one of the national centres of excellence or their approved satellite centres.
 - **Irish Cancer Society Volunteer Driver Service** is for patients undergoing chemotherapy treatments who are having difficulty getting to and from their local appointments in our partner hospitals.

To access either of these services please contact your hospital healthcare professional.

- **Irish Cancer Society Night Nursing**. We provide end-of-life care for cancer patients in their own home. We offer up to 10 nights of care for each patient. Our service allows patients to remain at home for the last days of their lives surrounded by their families and loved ones. This is the only service of its kind in the Republic, providing palliative nursing care at night to cancer patients.
- Our **publications and website information**. We provide information on a range of topics including cancer types, treatments and side-effects, coping with cancer, children and cancer, and financial concerns. Visit our website **www.cancer.ie** or call our Cancer Nurseline for a free copy of our publications.



If you would like more information on any of our services, call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.

Local cancer support services

The Irish Cancer Society works with cancer support services all over Ireland. They have a range of services for cancer patients and their families, during and after treatment, many of which are free. For example:

- **Professional counselling** (the Irish Cancer Society funds up to 8 sessions of free counselling in many affiliated support services)
- **Support groups**, often led by professionals like social workers, counsellors, psychologists, or cancer nurses
- **Special exercise programmes**, like the Irish Cancer Society's Strides for Life walking group programme
- **Stress management and relaxation techniques**, such as mindfulness and meditation
- **Complementary therapies** like massage, reflexology and acupuncture
- **Specialist services** such as prosthesis- or wig-fitting and manual lymph drainage
- **Mind and body sessions**, for example, yoga and tai chi
- **Expressive therapies** such as creative writing and art
- **Free Irish Cancer Society publications** and other high-quality, trustworthy information on a range of topics

Cancer support services usually have a drop-in service where you can call in for a cup of tea and find out what's available.

You can call our Cancer Nurseline on Freephone 1800 200 700 to find your nearest cancer support centre. Or see our online directory at <http://www.cancer.ie/support/support-in-your-area/directory>

Helpful books

The Irish Cancer Society has a wide range of information on reducing your risk of cancer, different types of cancer, treatments, and coping. For free copies call the Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also download or order the booklets on our website: www.cancer.ie.

You may find the following helpful:

Treatment and side-effects

Understanding Chemotherapy

Understanding Radiotherapy

Diet and Cancer

Coping with Fatigue



Coping and emotions

Understanding the Emotional Effects of Cancer

Lost for Words: How to Talk to Someone with Cancer

Who Can Ever Understand? Taking About Your Cancer

Talking to Children about Cancer: A Guide for Parents

A Time to Care: Caring for Someone Seriously Ill at Home

Caring for Someone with Cancer



Join the Irish Cancer Society team

If you want to make a difference to people affected by cancer, join our team!

Support people affected by cancer

Reaching out directly to people with cancer is one of the most rewarding ways to help:

- Help people needing lifts to hospital by becoming a volunteer driver
- Give one-on-one support to someone newly diagnosed with cancer as part of our Survivor Support programme
- Give information and support to people concerned about or affected by cancer at one of our hospital-based Daffodil Centres

Share your experiences

Use your voice to bring reassurance to cancer patients and their families, help people to connect with our services or inspire them to get involved as a volunteer:

- Share your cancer story
- Tell people about our services
- Describe what it's like to organise or take part in a fundraising event

Raise money

All our services are funded by the public's generosity:

- Donate direct
- Take part in one of our fundraising events or challenges
- Organise your own event

Contact our Cancer Nurseline on Freephone 1800 200 700 if you want to get involved!

Did you like this booklet?

We would love to hear your comments or suggestions.
Please email reviewers@irishcancer.ie

More information and support

If you would like more information or someone to talk to, now or at any time in the future, please call our Cancer Nurseline on 1800 200 700.

Irish Cancer Society

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T: 01 231 0500

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