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Complementary Therapies May Help Breast Cancer Patients

Treatments for breast cancer can take a toll on your health. You may have to deal with side effects like pain, fatigue, or depression. Complementary therapies, such as yoga or acupuncture, may help ease these problems. But which ones are most helpful? Experts recently weighed the evidence.



The best approach

Complementary therapies are those that are used in tandem with normal treatments. For instance, your doctor may recommend surgery and chemotherapy to fight your breast cancer. But you may try something like meditation to soothe stress.

Experts looked at the latest research on complementary therapies for breast cancer patients. They pored over more than 200 studies. They assessed the value of therapies such as acupuncture, hypnosis, tai chi, and vitamins. They wanted to know how well these helped patients deal with fatigue, worry, and pain.

Several therapies showed promise. The best were yoga, meditation, and relaxation techniques. These helped boost mood and fend off depression. Meditation was also found to promote quality of life. Other therapies that may help: massage for a better mood and electroacupuncture for nausea—a side effect of chemotherapy.

An informed choice

Many women with breast cancer try at least 1 type of complementary therapy. Managing side effects is a leading reason. Other women may use such therapy to ease anxiety and stress. They may also feel more in control of their own care.

If you or a loved one is thinking about trying a complementary therapy, start by talking with your doctor. Some choices, such as yoga, are generally safe. But enough might not be known about others. For instance, only limited research has been done on some dietary supplements. They may not mix well with mainstream treatments.

When considering complementary therapies for breast cancer or any other illness, ask these questions so you can make an informed choice:

- What are the benefits and risks? Some therapies may have a lot of upside. But others you may want to avoid. Your doctor is a good source for reliable information. He or she can also direct you to other health care providers or organizations that may help.
- Are there any side effects you should know about? Keep in mind: Some therapies may not have been studied enough yet to know about any potential reactions.
- How much does the therapy cost? Practices like meditation may cost you nothing but time. Others you may have to pay for. Some health plans now cover the cost of several complementary therapies. One example is acupuncture.
- Does it sound too good to be true? Some companies may market their products as a miracle cure for cancer or another illness. Be leery of such remedies. Talk with your doctor first before trying any product.

Learn more ([34_26146-1](#)) about the most common complementary therapies used for cancer.

Online resources

[American Cancer Society](http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/cid/documents/webcontent/acspc-041660-pdf.pdf) (<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/cid/documents/webcontent/acspc-041660-pdf.pdf>)

[National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](https://nccih.nih.gov) (<https://nccih.nih.gov>)

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