

# INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE FOR CANCER CARE

## A therapeutic outline

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This therapeutic outline provides an introduction to a variety of integrative medicine therapies that have been used and researched in the management of cancer symptoms and treatment side effects. This includes treatments with either nutraceuticals<sup>1</sup> or herbal medicine monotherapies<sup>2</sup> or where these are used adjunctively with conventional medical treatments.(1) Mind-body, manual, lifestyle, and other traditional therapies are also reviewed.

The outline has been drafted by experts in the field. However, it is not an exhaustive review of scientific evidence, such as a systematic review or meta-analysis, which is not its purpose. This outline provides a brief narrative review of the emerging evidence considered by the researchers at NICM Health Research Institute (NICM HRI) to be important in the area of integrative medicine for the management of cancer symptoms and treatment side effects.

## Why people use integrative medicine for cancer symptoms and treatment side effects

Complementary medicine (CM) is used in Australia and internationally to treat the symptoms of cancer and the side effects of treatment, such as anxiety, nausea, vomiting, peripheral neuropathy, and pain. An integrative approach to CM may improve patient outcomes by improving the effectiveness of conventional treatments through positive adjuvant effects and managing side effects, thereby improving tolerance of and compliance with chemotherapy and radiotherapy.(2)

The prevalence of CM use by people with cancer living in Australia increased from 22 per cent in 1996 to 65 per cent in 2008.(3, 4) CM is typically used as an adjuvant<sup>3</sup> to conventional treatment rather than an alternative. CM users tend to be mostly women, with breast and gynaecological cancers, have higher education and socioeconomic status, more advanced disease and younger or cultural groups where traditional health systems are part of usual mainstream care.(5) CM use is very high in women with breast cancer with 87 per cent reporting use.(6) Data is inconsistent on prevalence of use of CM use for particular tumour types. A nationwide survey in Japan found the prevalence of CM use was the highest in people with lung cancer (53 per cent).(7) In contrast, a European survey reported greater CM use among those diagnosed with pancreatic, liver, bone/spinal, and brain cancers.(8) In China, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is used to both treat cancer – often in synergy with conventional cancer therapies – as well as the symptoms of cancer and side effects of treatment within their standard healthcare system. In Australia, while the provision of CM by hospitals in Australia appears to have doubled over the past six years, services are limited and available in only 26 per cent of healthcare organisations.(9)

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<sup>1</sup> Nutraceuticals are nutrient-based natural products which are produced via pharmaceutical good manufacturing practice, standardised and optimised.

<sup>2</sup> A monotherapy describes a treatment that has only a single active ingredient. The single active ingredient could be a medicine or a vitamin or a single herbal ingredient.

<sup>3</sup> An adjuvant is a substance that is used in addition to usual treatment.

## Safety and evidence of integrative medicine in cancer care

CM studies in cancer care have generally been conducted in small population sample sizes which limits the strength and certainty of evidence for use. However, where there is indication of a favourable benefit it may be appropriate to adopt the use of a specific CM where safety of a particular CM has been determined and there is no adverse impact on the effectiveness of the conventional cancer treatment. For herbal medicines or dietary supplements, use may be contraindicated when a patient is undergoing cancer treatment but considered safe when treatment is completed. Therapies such as meditation, acupuncture, relaxation therapy, passive music therapy<sup>4</sup>, massage or yoga, pose relatively little risk and may have a positive impact on symptoms.(10, 11)

For traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), there were over 5834 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) conducted between 1985 and 2017.(12) The majority of these studies (4,752) combined TCM with conventional treatment such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy, while 1,082 used TCM only primarily to address symptoms and side effects. Most studies were in herbal medicine, with 1082 examining acupoint stimulation. The majority of RCTs (4051; 69.44 per cent) concluded there were beneficial effects using either TCM alone or TCM plus conventional treatment compared with conventional treatment. For the use of acupuncture alone, a bibliometric analysis of all acupuncture-related research articles including clinical and animal studies found research into cancer was the second most researched area after pain, and that research into this area is increasing.(13)

The use of CM should always be discussed with the treating cancer care team. In integrative oncology, patients and their cancer treatment teams work together to find appropriate conventional and complementary therapies that have been shown to be safe and effective. The following therapeutic outline is designed to provide a brief indication of where there may be support for an intervention to treat a particular symptom or side effect of cancer treatment. It is beyond the scope of this review to provide definitive summary of the evidence in support or otherwise any particular intervention.

## Effectiveness of integrative medicine in patients with cancer

The following summary provides an overview of potential clinical areas of benefit from the use of integrative medicine as a therapeutic tool. An overview of reviews was undertaken, including a systematic search of Pubmed/Medline and Cochrane Collaboration publications to end 2021 limited to English language papers. However, this summary is not an exhaustive systematic review of all scientific evidence in the field, but rather provides a brief narrative review of the emerging evidence in key clinical areas as understood by expert researchers in the field.

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<sup>4</sup> Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. Music therapy can be passive, for example listening to music, or active, that is creating, singing, or moving to music (<https://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy/> - accessed April 2018).

The Society of Integrative Oncology, a multi-disciplinary professional organisation for integrative oncology, is developing guidelines in conjunction with the American Society for Clinical Oncology (ASCO) on fatigue, anxiety, and depression<sup>5</sup>. These will complement the 2022 Integrative Medicine for Pain Management in Oncology: Society for Integrative Oncology – ASCO Guideline and the 2017 ASCO endorsed guideline for integrative oncology for breast cancer. NICM HRI has commenced a series of reviews of the evidence for biologically based therapies, mind-body therapies, and acupuncture in the treatment of a range of other side effects and symptoms.

People with cancer experience a range of symptoms and side effects of treatment, often in ‘symptom clusters’. The careful selection of one therapy may address several symptoms simultaneously. This outline covers key applications and research of nutraceuticals, herbal medicines, and mind-body therapies for some of these symptoms and side effects.

## Nutraceuticals and herbal medicines in cancer care

### Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (CINV) – Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

- [\*Cannabis and cannabinoids for CINV\*](#) - A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2015 identified 29 studies investigating efficacy of cannabinoids in the treatment of CINV (14 for nabilone; three for dronabinol; one for nabiximols; six for Tetrahydrocannabinol; four for levonantradol). While findings were suggestive of increased risk of short-term adverse effects associated with cannabinoids, all studies demonstrated a greater benefit of cannabinoids compared with comparators or placebo but statistical significance was not achieved in all reviewed studies.(14) Furthermore, conclusions drawn by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine review suggest that there is conclusive evidence that oral cannabinoids are effective antiemetics in the treatment of CINV, however, that there is a lack of good quality randomised trials investigating the use of botanically derived cannabis despite an abundance of anecdotal reports.(15) Due to the complexity of botanical cannabis phytochemistry and obstacles to researching the plant due to Drug Scheduling laws internationally, this is a knowledge gap that should be a future research priority.(14-16)
  - [Current recommendations and guidance](#) – In Australia, federal government guidance documents recommend that high-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) medicinal cannabis products can sometimes be effective for nausea and vomiting but should only be prescribed after newer standard approved treatments have failed.(17) The Cancer Council of Australia and the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia joint position statement on the medical use of cannabis(18) suggests that there is some evidence that cannabis and cannabinoids in controlled delivery may have a benefit to people with cancer where conventional treatments are unsuccessful, such as in providing relief in CINV. Conversely, the American Society for Clinical Oncology suggests that the “evidence remains insufficient for a recommendation regarding treatment with

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<sup>5</sup> <https://integrativeonc.org/practice-guidelines/announcements/208-announcement-of-sio-asco-collaboration-on-two-more-evidence-based-guidelines-in-2021-22>.

medical marijuana for the prevention of nausea and vomiting in patients with cancer who receive chemotherapy or radiation therapy.” Although approved cannabinoids – dronabinol and nabilone – are recommended for the treatment of CINV.

- [Chinese herbal medicine for CINV in people with advanced non-small cell lung cancer \(NSCLC\) undergoing chemotherapy](#) – A meta-analysis published in 2013 compared adjunctive use of Chinese herbal medicine with usual care chemotherapy in people undergoing treatment for advanced NSCLC and found adjunctive use of Chinese herbal medicine to be effective in reducing nausea and vomiting at toxicity grade of III–IV (RR = 0.24, 95 per cent CI = 0.12–0.50,  $p = 0.0001$ ).<sup>(22)</sup> The five RCTs included in this meta-analysis used different herbal formulations which makes it difficult to make a specific recommendation on Chinese herbal medicine for CINV.<sup>(23–27)</sup>
- [Ginger for CINV in women with breast cancer undergoing chemotherapy](#) – Ginger can be considered as an addition to antiemetic drugs to control nausea and vomiting experienced by women with breast cancer undergoing chemotherapy,<sup>(10, 28)</sup> but the evidence on its use with other cancer types is not as strong.<sup>(29)</sup> As such, the American Society of Clinical Oncology guidelines on antiemetics state that evidence remains insufficient for a recommendation for or against the use of ginger for the prevention of nausea and vomiting in patients with cancer. In another systematic review of ginger in different cancer types a statistically significant effect of ginger tea consumption was found on overall CINV severity. However, the certainty in this effect was very low.<sup>(31)</sup>
  - [Current recommendation](#) – Ginger can be considered as an addition to antiemetic drugs to control nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy in women with breast cancer (Grade C<sup>6</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.<sup>(28)</sup>
- [Glutamine for CINV](#)
  - [Current recommendation](#) – Glutamine should not be recommended for improving nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade D<sup>7</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.<sup>(28)</sup>

## Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN) - Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

- [Cannabis or cannabinoids for CIPN](#) – Results from a small-scale pilot study (n=18) investigating Sativex – a botanically derived standardised cannabis extract – for the treatment of chemotherapy-induced neuropathic pain found there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and placebo groups in terms of pain outcomes. However,

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<sup>6</sup> A [Grade C](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

<sup>7</sup> A [Grade D](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates no demonstrated effect.

there appeared to be responders suggesting a larger, more statistically powered fully randomised, placebo-controlled trial is warranted.(32, 33)

- [Nutritional supplements for CIPN](#) – A systematic review of 24 studies concluded that currently no nutritional supplement has shown solid beneficial evidence to be recommended for the treatment or prophylaxis of CIPN.(34)
  - [Acetyl-L-carnitine](#) is not recommended for the prevention of CIPN.(10, 28, 35, 36)
  - [Acetyl-L-carnitine](#) may be a treatment option for paclitaxel and cisplatin induced CIPN.(37, 38)
  - [Calcium and magnesium infusion](#) (CaMg) is not recommended for the prevention of CIPN in patients receiving oxaliplatin-based chemotherapy.(35)
  - [Glutathione](#) is not recommended for the prevention of CIPN in patients receiving paclitaxel/carboplatin chemotherapy.(35)
  - [Omega-3 fatty acids](#) may be beneficial for patients undergoing chemotherapy, according to one systematic review.(39) In another meta-analysis of three studies, the omega-3 PUFA group had significantly reduced the likelihood of developing CIPN compared to the control group.(21) But subsequent trials are needed to replicate and confirm these findings before a recommendation can be made.(1)
  - [Vitamin E](#) is not recommended for the prevention of CIPN in patients with cancer undergoing treatment with neurotoxic agents.(35)
  - No recommendations can be made on the use of N-acetylcysteine, glutamine or glutathione for patients receiving cisplatin or oxaliplatin-based chemotherapy for the prevention of CIPN at this time.(35)
  - No recommendations can be made on the use of go-sha-jinki-gan, Jinlongshe granules or Xiao-Ai-Tong decoction for the prevention of CIPN at this time.(35, 40)

## Fatigue - Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

Fatigue is experienced by most patients undergoing cancer treatment and some people continue to experience fatigue after treatment has finished. The fatigue can become debilitating and is referred to as 'cancer-related fatigue'. Supportive care<sup>8</sup> can aid in reducing the severity of fatigue.(43)

- [Acetyl-L-carnitine](#) – Should not be recommended for improving fatigue during treatment in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade D<sup>9</sup>). (10, 44) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)
- [Astragalus](#)<sup>10</sup> – May be helpful in advanced cancer in the form of Astragalus polysaccharides (PG2), a processed form of Astragalus.(45-47)

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<sup>8</sup> Supportive care for cancer patients refers to the prevention and management of adverse effects of cancer and its treatment<sup>42</sup>. Berman R, Davies A, Cooksley T, Gralla R, Carter L, Darlington E, et al. Supportive Care: An Indispensable Component of Modern Oncology. Clin Oncol (R Coll Radiol). 2020;32(11):781-8.

<sup>9</sup> A [Grade D](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates no demonstrated effect.

<sup>10</sup> The roots of Astragalus membranaceus also known as milk vetch or Huangqi, is one of the most commonly used herbs in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In the context of Western medicine, it is claimed to have immune modulating effects, anticancer actions, and support quality of life for people with cancer. Astragalus is often used in combination with other herbs, however three meta-analyses and six randomized controlled trials have evaluated Astragalus as a single herb for cancer outcomes.

- [Chinese herbal medicines for fatigue](#) - Some Chinese herbal medicines may be useful for cancer-related fatigue. An example is American Ginseng, which has been found to be helpful for fatigue in patients with breast cancer.(48) Other specific Chinese herbs may be considered but should not be used concurrently with other treatments, such as chemotherapy, as the trials done in this space to date are methodologically weak.(49, 50)
- [Ginseng](#) - Can be considered for improving fatigue during treatment in women with breast cancer according to the Society for Integrative Oncology (Grade C<sup>11</sup>).(10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28, 51) In a systematic review of ginseng, all three types of ginseng were tolerated well with few low-grade adverse events. *American ginseng*, for up to eight-weeks significantly reduced fatigue. *Asian ginseng*, symptoms of fatigue at the dosage of 400 mg/day in the majority of patients with CRF. *Korean ginseng*, consumed at the dosage of 3000 mg/day for 12-weeks, decreased symptoms of CRF. But the number of studies are not adequate to adopt ginseng as a standard treatment for CRF in all cancer types.(52)
- [Guarana](#) - Should not be recommended for improving fatigue during treatment in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade D<sup>12</sup>).(10, 44) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)

## Hot flushes - Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

- [Black cohosh for hot flushes](#) - There is not enough evidence to recommend black cohosh for hot flushes.(28)
- [Herbal medicines for hot flushes](#) - There is insufficient evidence currently on effectiveness of herbal medicine treatments for hot flushes resulting from endocrine therapy for breast cancer so no recommendation can be made in this area.(53)
- [Soy for hot flushes](#) - Soy is not recommended for hot flushes in patients with breast cancer due to lack of effect in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade D<sup>13</sup>).(10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)

<sup>11</sup> A [Grade C](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

<sup>12</sup> A [Grade D](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates no demonstrated effect.

<sup>13</sup> A [Grade D](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates no demonstrated effect.

## Mucositis<sup>14</sup> - Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

- [\*Aloe vera for mucositis\*](#) - There is mixed evidence on the efficacy of aloe vera for the prevention and treatment of radiation induced mucositis.(54, 55)
- [\*Calendula officinalis for mucositis\*](#) - A small RCT (n=40 participants) assessing the efficacy of two per cent calendula extract mouthwash (as oral gel) in reducing radiation induced oropharyngeal mucositis (OM) in patients with head and neck cancer undergoing treatment found that calendula extract gel was effective in decreasing the intensity of radiotherapy-induced OM.(56, 57)
- [\*Glutamine for mucositis\*](#) - Parenteral glutamine for mucositis is not recommended but oral glutamine is recommended, based on two RCTs showing that a glutamine dose from 10 to 30 g daily during RT-CT, may prevent mucositis.(58)
- [\*Honey for mucositis\*](#) - Honey, applied topically and administered systemically, has been suggested for prevention in patients with head and neck cancer who received either RT or RT-CT. Some of the RCTs had a mixed patient population (RT and RT-CT), small sample size, and different sources for the honey; therefore, only a suggestion was possible.(58)
- [\*Turmeric for mucositis\*](#) - Curcumin is an anti-inflammatory and an antioxidant. Curcumin may be helpful in reducing severity and redness of mucositis when used as a topical application.(59) In another RCT, the prophylactic use of curcumin delayed the incidence and severity of mucositis in those patients with head and neck cancer receiving radiotherapy.(60) Topical therapies preparations using 500 gm of fresh curcumin powder were effective, as was a turmeric gargle of a 400 mg turmeric capsule.
- [\*Zinc for mucositis\*](#) - Supplementation was reported to reduce the incidence and severity of mucositis in leukaemia patients undergoing chemotherapy(61); and in patients receiving radiation therapy.(62) However, the Multinational Association for Supportive Care in Cancer has reviewed recent evidence and concluded that no guideline recommendation is possible either way currently.(58)

## Pain - Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

- [\*Chinese herbal medicines for pain relief in people with cancer\*](#) - A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2016 found adjunctive use of Chinese herbal medicine for pain relief in patients with a variety of different kinds of advanced cancers resulted in significantly reduced pain (three studies; weighted mean difference in pain score of -0.90; 95 per cent CI: -1.69 to -0.11).(63-66) However, all of these studies provided limited information regarding risk of bias, and further to this, the three RCTs included in this meta-analysis used different herbal formulations which makes it difficult to make a specific recommendation on Chinese herbal medicine for pain.

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<sup>14</sup> Mucositis is the painful inflammation and ulceration of the mucous membranes lining the digestive tract, usually as an adverse effect of chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment for cancer.

- [Cannabis and cannabinoids for pain relief in people with cancer](#) – A multicentre, double-blind, randomised placebo-controlled study by Johnson and colleagues demonstrated that a standardised tetrahydrocannabinol:cannabidiol extract (THC:CBD) was efficacious as an analgesic in patients with intractable cancer related pain that was not controlled by opioid medication.(67) Further, Sativex – a botanically derived standardised cannabis extract - was found to be a useful add-on analgesic for patients with opioid refractory cancer pain in a randomised, placebo-controlled graded-dose trial.(68) And a systematic review by Whiting et al. found that analyses across seven trials that assessed nabiximols (i.e. Sativex) and one examining inhaled cannabis was suggestive that plant-derived cannabinoids increase the odds for improvement of pain by approximately 40 per cent vs the control condition (OR, 1.41; 95 per cent CI=0.99-2.00; eight trials).(14, 69)
  - [Current recommendations and guidance](#) – In Australia, federal government guidance documents have only specifically addressed chronic non-cancer pain (CNCP).(17) The Cancer Council of Australia and the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia joint position statement on the medical use of cannabis suggests that there is some evidence that cannabis and cannabinoids in controlled delivery may have a benefit to people with cancer where conventional treatments are unsuccessful, such as in providing relief as an adjunctive analgesic in patients with moderate to severe pain.(18)

## Sleep – Treatment with nutraceuticals and herbal medicines

- [Melatonin](#) – In RCT among people with breast cancer who took 5 mg of melatonin at bedtime there were improved measures of sleep quality.(70) A systematic review of melatonin, dosage minimum and maximum of 3 mg and 20 mg, showed a significant effect on sleep quality and insomnia in four studies in people with cancer. Melatonin was found comparable to zolpidem in affecting sleep duration, latency, efficiency, and disturbance in colorectal cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.(71)

## Mind-body therapies in cancer care

### Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (CINV)

- [Relaxation](#) – The evidence as it currently stands is limited with regard to the use of relaxation in the management of CINV in women with breast cancer, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest relaxation can be considered as an addition to antiemetics for the control of acute CINV in women.(73, 74)
  - [Current recommendation](#) - Relaxation can be considered as additions to antiemetic drugs to control nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy in women with breast



cancer (Grade C<sup>15</sup>).(10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)

## Chemotherapy-induced cognitive change

Mindfulness-based approaches to reducing cancer-related cognitive impairment may be effective. A meta-analysis of four RCTs found a significant difference in subjective cognitive function and mental health quality of life. The limited number of studies require further research to confirm these findings.(75) Further research is also needed to optimise timing, duration and content.(76)

## Fatigue

- [Mindfulness](#) – Mindfulness is effective at reducing fatigue severity in cancer.(43, 77-79)
- [Relaxation techniques](#) – Research shows relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation and guided imagery are effective at improving fatigue symptoms/ cancer-related fatigue.(43, 80)
- [Yoga](#) – Yoga has been shown to be effective in reducing fatigue in women with breast cancer when compared with no other intervention.(78, 81, 82)
  - [Current recommendation](#) - Yoga can be considered for improving post-treatment fatigue in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade C<sup>16</sup>).(10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)
- [Qigong](#) – The first randomised controlled trial completed that was large enough to detect an effect found that medical qigong is an effective treatment for fatigue in people with cancer (83) As a result of this study, the American Society of Clinical Oncology notes that qigong may offer some benefit to people with cancer experiencing fatigue but calls for additional research.(78, 84)

## Mood disturbance, stress, and quality of life

[Mindfulness](#)-based interventions are associated with reduced anxiety and depression.(85) Specific interventions such as the [Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction \(MBSR\) programs](#) have been found to benefit the mental health (quality of life, mood stress, anxiety, depression) of patients with

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<sup>15</sup> A [Grade C](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

<sup>16</sup> A [Grade C](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

cancer.(86-89) Mindfulness-based interventions are varied in length and type, effects are variable, suggesting the need for research to optimise the dose of the intervention.

Yoga - of various types - has been found to be effective in reducing anxiety, depressive symptoms and other mood disturbances in people with cancer(90); this is in line with research that shows yoga reduces salivary cortisol levels(94, 95), with investigators reporting a dose-response relationship.(96) Relaxation therapy, such as guided visualisation or Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), is effective for improving tension, anxiety, and mood and decreasing hostility, BP, pulse rate, nausea, sleep disturbance, and pain.(97) Relaxation is recommended for improving mood disturbance and depressive symptoms.(98)

Passive music therapy is recommended to reduce anxiety during radiation therapy, chemotherapy sessions, and post-surgery in women with breast cancer, with interventions found to reduce sedation requirements during radiation therapy. Culturally appropriate music therapy interventions for psychological distress is associated with improvements.(103)

## Pain

- Music Therapy - There is limited evidence suggesting a benefit on pain of music therapy.(125, 126)
  - Current recommendations - Music therapy can be considered for the management of pain in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade C<sup>17</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> Music therapy may be offered to patients experiencing surgical pain from cancer surgery, but evidence is low due to the quality of the studies.<sup>(1)</sup>

Guided imagery with progressive muscle relaxation may be offered to patients experiencing general pain from cancer treatment.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Sleep disturbance

- Yoga - Gentle yoga can be considered for improving sleep in women with breast cancer.(81, 127-131)
  - Current recommendation - Gentle yoga can be considered for improving sleep in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Clinical Oncology (Grade C<sup>18</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.<sup>(28)</sup>
- Relaxation training - Relaxation training has been shown to be effective for improving sleep quality in people with cancer.(97)

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<sup>17</sup> A Grade C recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

<sup>18</sup> A Grade C recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

# Manual therapies in cancer care

## Mucositis<sup>19</sup>

- [Low level laser therapy \(LLLT\) for mucositis](#) – The Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer and International Society of Oral Oncology (MASCC/ISOO) Clinical Practice Guidelines for the management of mucositis provide specific protocols for the prevention of oral mucositis using low level laser therapy (also referred to as *photobiomodulation* (PBM)).(58) PBM is recommended for prevention of mucositis in patients with head and neck cancer receiving radiotherapy or chemotherapy based on recent evidence.

## Fatigue

- [Massage for cancer related fatigue](#) – There is weak evidence that massage therapy has a weak short-term effect on cancer related fatigue.(10, 135-137)

## Lymphoedema

- [Manual lymphatic drainage and compression bandaging for lymphoedema](#) – There is limited evidence for the use of manual lymphatic drainage(138-145) or compression bandaging(140, 142) to treat arm lymphedema related to breast cancer. Despite this, either therapy can be considered as a treatment option for lymphedema, with manual lymphatic drainage being considered for those who have sensitivity to bandaging.
  - [Current recommendation](#) - Manual lymphatic drainage and compression bandaging can be considered for improving lymphedema in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade C<sup>20</sup>). (10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)

## Pain

- [Massage for pain relief](#) – Massage provides immediate pain relief to people with a variety of different cancers, including those with advanced cancer and those having undergone surgery for cancer(136, 146). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate the effects of massage therapy in all cancer types found that massage therapy largely reduced pain in patients and that foot reflexology appeared to be more effective than body or aroma massage.(147) The 2022 American Society of Integrative Oncology pain guidelines recommend massage of patients experiencing pain during palliative or hospice care; and for

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<sup>19</sup> Mucositis is the painful inflammation and ulceration of the mucous membranes lining the digestive tract, usually as an adverse effect of chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment for cancer.

<sup>20</sup> A [Grade C](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

chronic pain in survivors of adult cancers. There is evidence that perioperative patients may benefit from massage used in conjunction with acupuncture in addition to usual care.(149, 150)

## Lifestyle therapies in cancer care

### Exercise

- [Exercise during and after cancer treatment](#) - Evidence strongly suggests that exercise is not only safe and feasible both during and after cancer treatment, but specific doses of aerobic, combined aerobic and resistance training; and/or resistance training can improve care-related health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, fatigue, physical functioning and quality of life.(155) The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia recommends people with cancer avoid inactivity and progress towards at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise and two to three moderate intensity resistance exercise sessions each week.(156)
- [Exercise to reduce cancer risk and reduce risk of cancer recurrence](#) - There is strong evidence that physical activity reduces the risk of cancers of the breast, colon, endometrium, bladder, stomach, oesophagus (adenocarcinoma) and kidney, and moderate evidence for an association with lung cancer risk. There is limited evidence that physical activity is associated with reduced risk for prostate cancer overall.(159, 160) Exercise has a favourable effect on mortality and recurrence in people with cancer.(160)

## Traditional therapies in cancer care

### Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (CINV)

- [Acupuncture for nausea and vomiting related to chemotherapy or radiation treatment](#) - Reviews of studies using acupuncture of various types in cancer care - electroacupuncture, manual acupuncture, acupressure, surface electrodes, or magnets - show that acupuncture can be considered as an addition to antiemetics to help control nausea and vomiting when people undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatment.(161-165)
  - [Current recommendation](#) - Acupressure and electroacupuncture can be considered as an addition to antiemetic drugs to control nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade B<sup>21</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)

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<sup>21</sup> A [Grade B](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates there is high certainty that the net benefit is moderate or there is moderate certainty that the net benefit is moderate to substantial.

## Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN)

- [Acupuncture for CIPN](#) – A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2022 assessed the efficacy of acupuncture for the treatment of CIPN. This study included nine RCTs with a total of 582 participants. Meta-analysis showed that acupuncture led to significant improvements in pain scores and nervous system symptoms, acupuncture may effectively relieve CIPN pain and functional limitation.(166, 167)
  - Current recommendation - Acupuncture may be offered to patients experiencing chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy from cancer treatment.(1)

## Dysphagia

- [Acupuncture for dysphagia caused by chemotherapy treatment for head and neck cancers](#) – There are some studies that indicate acupuncture may be useful in the treatment of dysphagia caused by chemotherapy treatment for head and neck cancers, but sample sizes are small, interventions variable, larger studies are needed.(168-170)

## Fatigue

- [Acupuncture for fatigue post cancer treatment](#) – Acupuncture can be considered as a treatment for patients, particularly for fatigue that lingers after cancer treatment has finished, noting the evidence suggests the net benefit is likely to be small.(10, 78, 171)
  - Current recommendation – Acupuncture can be considered for improving post-treatment fatigue according to the Society of Integrative Oncology in women with breast cancer (Grade C<sup>22</sup>).(10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.(28)

## Hot flushes

- [Acupuncture for hot flushes in women with breast cancer](#) – Data from randomised trials suggest that acupuncture might be an efficacious option for the treatment of hot flushes in breast cancer survivors receiving adjuvant endocrine therapy. The effect duration of acupuncture appears to persist after treatment completion. Acupuncture could be considered for reducing hot flushes in women with breast cancer, with reported similar or better efficacy than venlafaxine and gabapentin.(172-175) Whenever available, this intervention could be considered for breast cancer survivors because it has very few side-effects and is associated

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<sup>22</sup> A Grade C recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

with additional benefits in other potential target symptoms, such as cancer-related fatigue and joint pain.(176)

- Current recommendation - Acupuncture can be considered for improving hot flushes in women with breast cancer according to the Society of Integrative Oncology (Grade C<sup>23</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.<sup>(28)</sup>

## Lymphoedema

- Acupuncture for breast cancer treatment related lymphoedema - In a review of 14 RCTs with 758 participants of acupuncture and moxibustion arm circumference (compared to routine care), range of motion and adduction (compared to oral diosmin) all significantly improved. (177) Acupuncture and moxibustion appears safe for people with breast cancer treatment related lymphoedema.(166, 178-181) However, studies are still required to confirm these findings.

## Mood disturbance, stress, and quality of life

*Acupuncture* may be effective in the management of anxiety and for stress in women with breast cancer.(182-185)

## Pain

- Acupuncture for arthralgia induced by aromatase inhibitors (AI) - Acupuncture can be recommended for arthralgia induced by aromatase inhibitors used for the treatment of breast cancer demonstrating similar results to medication with fewer side effects, but evidence suggests the net benefit is likely small.(161, 187-189).
  - Current recommendations - Acupuncture should be offered to patients experiencing AI-related joint pain in breast cancer.(1)
- Acupuncture for cancer related pain - A systematic review of 17 RCTs (and meta-analysis of 14 of these trials) published in 2019 found that acupuncture and/or acupressure was significantly associated with reduced cancer pain and decreased use of analgesics, although the evidence quality was moderate.(190) Acupuncture is suggested as an adjunct treatment when there is inadequate control of symptoms, particularly malignancy-related and surgery-induced pain.(11, 191-194) Studies were positive for pain post-operative for chronic pain or dysfunction as a result of neck dissection and breast cancer.(195, 196)

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<sup>23</sup> A Grade C recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

- Current recommendations - Acupuncture can be considered for the management of pain in women with breast cancer according to the Society for Integrative Oncology (Grade C<sup>24</sup>).<sup>(10)</sup> This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.<sup>(28)</sup>
- Acupuncture may be offered to patients experiencing general pain or musculoskeletal pain from cancer. This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.<sup>(1)</sup>
- Acupressure for pain during treatment.
  - Current recommendations - Reflexology or acupressure may be offered to patients experiencing pain during systemic therapy for cancer treatment.

## Sleep disturbance

- Acupuncture for cancer related insomnia - Few rigorous trials have tested the effects of acupuncture for the management of cancer-related insomnia to date.<sup>(161)</sup> However, a systemic review published in 2017 including six RCTs and a total of 475 people with a variety of different cancers concluded there is a low level of evidence that acupuncture may be superior to sham acupuncture, drugs or hormone therapy for the management of cancer-related insomnia. Effect sizes were found to be very small and therefore of uncertain clinical significance.<sup>(197, 198)</sup>

## Xerostomia<sup>25</sup>

- Acupuncture for xerostomia related to cancer treatment - There are some studies that indicate acupuncture may be useful in the treatment of xerostomia - mostly in the area of head and neck cancer - but sample sizes were small and larger studies are needed.<sup>(40, 195, 199-205)</sup> A 2020 meta-analysis and systematic review suggests that acupuncture is effective at improving xerostomia symptoms in people with cancer but not at objective salivary flow measurements.<sup>(206)</sup>
  - Current recommendations - The Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer (MASCC) and ASCO recommend acupuncture be offered during radiation therapy for head and neck cancer to reduce the risk of developing xerostomia; and after radiation therapy for improving xerostomia.<sup>(207)</sup>
- There is also a weak recommendation that transcutaneous electrostimulation or acupuncture-like transcutaneous electrostimulation of the salivary glands be offered after radiation therapy

<sup>24</sup> A Grade C recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates that the evidence is equivocal or that there is at least moderate certainty that the net benefit is small.

<sup>25</sup> Xerostomia is defined as dry mouth resulting from reduced or absent saliva flow and may occur after radiation treatment to the head and/or neck region.

in patients with head and neck cancer for improvement of salivary gland hypofunction and xerostomia.(207)

## Other potential benefits of integrative medicine in cancer care

- [\*Yoga to improve quality of life in patients with breast cancer\*](#) - Few yoga studies have shown preliminary efficacy in improving QOL of life in patients with breast cancer including those newly diagnosed, those undergoing treatment, and longer-term survivors.(10, 93, 129, 208-212)
  - [\*Current recommendations\*](#) - Yoga is recommended for improving quality of life in women with breast cancer by the Society of Clinical Oncology (Grade B<sup>26</sup>). (10) This recommendation is endorsed by the American Society for Clinical Oncology.(28)
- [\*Massage for immune system function and neuroendocrine system function\*](#) - Massage may improve immune and neuroendocrine functions.(30, 119)
- [\*Acupuncture for chemotherapy induced immune system impacts\*](#) - There are some small studies of variable quality suggesting acupuncture may be beneficial for chemotherapy induced leukopenia<sup>27</sup> and neutropenia<sup>28</sup> but further study is needed.(213, 214)
- [\*Chinese herbal medicine for as an adjunctive treatment to cancer treatment\*](#) - Chinese herbal medicine has been used as an adjunct to chemotherapy for people undergoing treatment for a variety of different cancers in China, including advanced non-small cell lung cancer,(22) inoperable pancreatic cancer,(215) nasopharyngeal cancer(216) and breast cancer.(217) It has also been used for cancer palliative care.(218) However, this body of work needs further investigation in Western countries before any recommendations relevant to this context can be made.

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<sup>26</sup> A [Grade B](#) recommendation of the Society of Integrative Oncology indicates there is high certainty that the net benefit is moderate or there is moderate certainty that the net benefit is moderate to substantial.



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