



Taking Care of the Whole You

A practical and patient-friendly
guide to integrative oncology



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Welcome!

This eBook is dedicated to you.

This eBook was written by a team of cancer survivors, patient advocates, and medical professionals who help cancer patients – but its main goal is to be a resource for you, the patients and caregivers experiencing cancer. It provides information for all types of cancer and for people everywhere, though the authors acknowledge many of the resources are based in the US.

This eBook aims to:

- Share what integrative oncology is;
- Define many of the terms you may hear related to integrative oncology;
- Explain the numerous benefits of this approach to cancer care;
- Offer resources from sources that are rooted in science;
- Provide evidence of the benefits; and,
- Give you practical tips for how to afford and work integrative practices into your lives.

Based on where you are on your journey, consider these tips for how to best use this eBook:

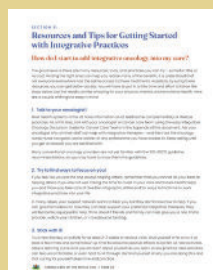
If you have been recently diagnosed and/or have not heard of integrative oncology, it is best to start at the beginning.



If you are familiar with integrative oncology and/or are already working with integrative practitioners, you may learn more from the benefits, guidelines, and resources sections ([Section 3](#) onward).



If you are looking for resources to find a treatment center, medical professional, or community provider of integrative services, [Section 5](#) is packed with links to more information and free resources.



And, if you know what you would like to do to adopt or add more integrative oncology but feel limited by time or money, [Section 5](#) goes over practical tips for meeting your goals.



SECTION 1:

Introduction to Integrative Oncology

No matter where you are on your cancer journey as a patient or caregiver, you may have heard the terms “Integrative,” “Complementary,” and/or “Alternative” in the context of cancer care. But what are these? Are they right for you or your loved one? How can you find out more?

To start, here are some definitions:

Integrative Oncology

Conventional Medicine

Treatment accepted by medical care experts as the proper treatment for a certain type of disease. May also be called “standard of care.”

Examples include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and hormonal therapy.



Lifestyle Modifications

Making changes to everyday behaviors or routines that impact overall health and wellness. Changes are sustained over time to realize the benefits.

Examples include nutrition, physical activity, and sleep.



Complementary Medicine*

The use of products and/or practices that are not standard of care but are evidence-based and used alongside standard of care treatments. Also called “complementary practices.”

Examples include acupuncture, yoga, massage, tai chi and qi gong, and meditation and mindfulness.



Alternative Medicine*

A product or practice that is not evidence-based and is used instead of standard of care.

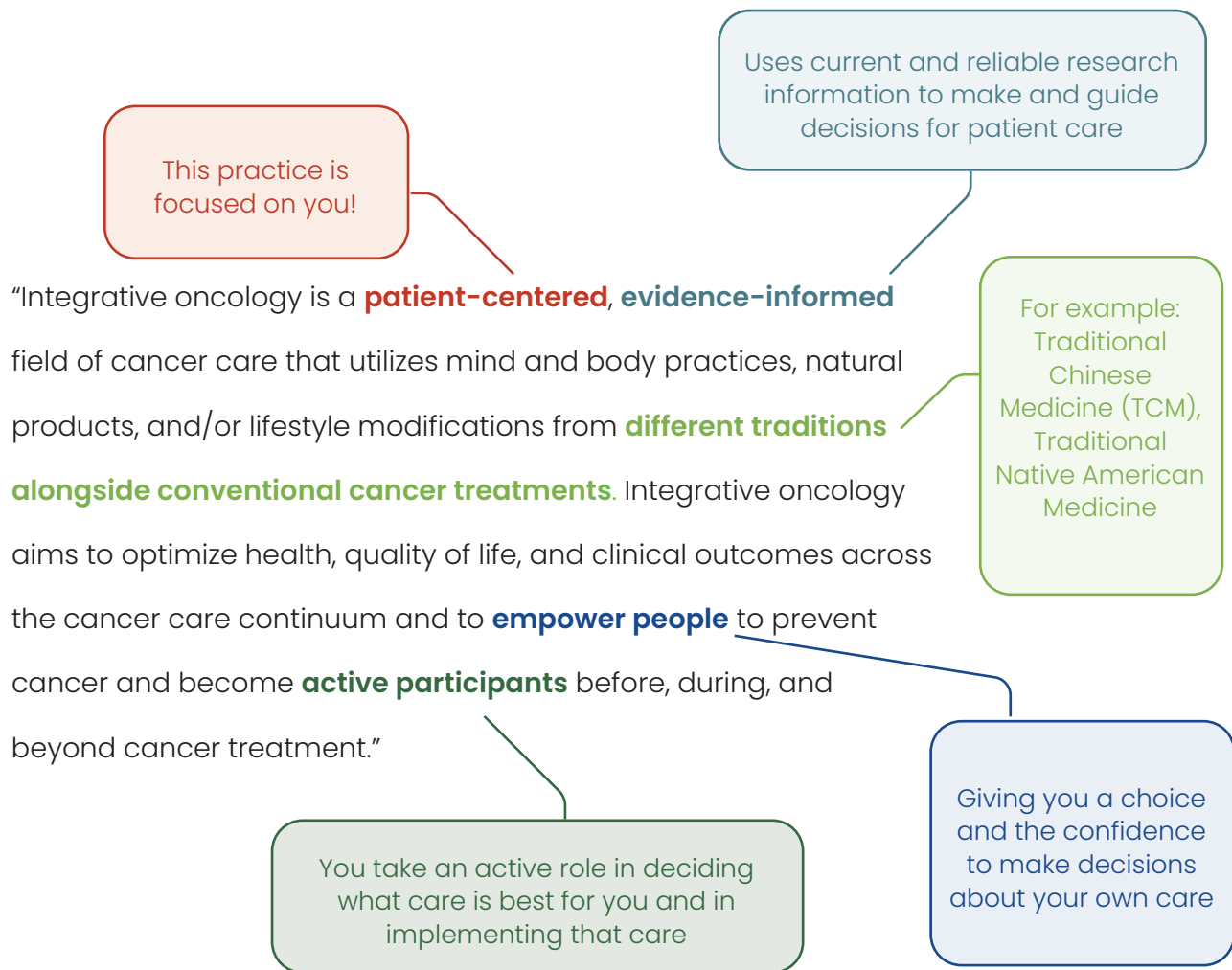


*Derived from <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam>



What is integrative oncology?

A clear definition by Witt et al. was published in JNCI Monographs in 2017:



The terms "complementary" and "alternative" are sometimes confused, but there is a difference. The focus of this document is on integrative, complementary, and lifestyle methods used in addition to conventional medicine. Therapies used in place of conventional medicine are called alternative therapies. There is not strong evidence that alternative therapies are effective and safe as a stand-alone cure for cancer. Therefore, it is not recommended to rely only on alternative therapies when conventional therapies are also available. Delaying effective conventional therapies may negatively affect outcomes.



What is a “cancer care team” and how does it relate to integrative oncology?

People with cancer being treated with conventional medicine may have many experts on their care team, such as: Medical Oncologists, Hematology Oncologists, Radiation Oncologists, Surgical Oncologists, Oncology Nurses, Nurse Navigators, Rehabilitation Specialists, Psychologists, and Social Workers (among others). In this document, this group will be called the “cancer care team.” The team may be experienced and/or certified in integrative oncology, but this is not always the case.

This cancer care team can have other professionals added that work in complementary practices or lifestyle modifications, which is then called the “integrative team.” For example, patients may also see professionals specializing in a therapy such as: Yoga Teachers or Therapists, Nutritionists, Acupuncturists, Massage Therapists, Exercise professionals, and others. Some of these professionals may be at your hospital or cancer center, or they may be in your community. The model is evolving, but most patients today must do some work to find the professionals that will be part of the larger integrative team.

Then, there are other professionals trained in combination with or outside of traditional medical schools who patients may find useful. Below are definitions and later in [Section 5](#), there are tips on how to think about putting together the best team for your needs:



Allopathic and Osteopathic Physicians

Known as MD's (Doctor of Medicine) or DO's (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine), these two professionals are closely related. Allopathic doctors follow a model of diagnosing and treating illness with medication or surgical interventions. Osteopathic doctors go to traditional medical schools and then specialize in holistic therapies and manual manipulation like chiropractic and massage. Osteopathic doctors tend to engage more actively in preventive care, a whole-person approach, and lifestyle modifications.



Naturopathic Physician

Known as NDs (Naturopathic Doctors), these professionals provide evidence-informed guidance on the safe and effective use of natural and supportive therapies when combined with conventional treatment, helping with treatment side effects and improving quality of life. NDs prescribe pharmaceuticals as well as botanicals, nutraceuticals, acupuncture, tissue manipulation, and other modalities.. See [Section 5](#) for a list of directories that include naturopathic doctors.



SECTION 2:

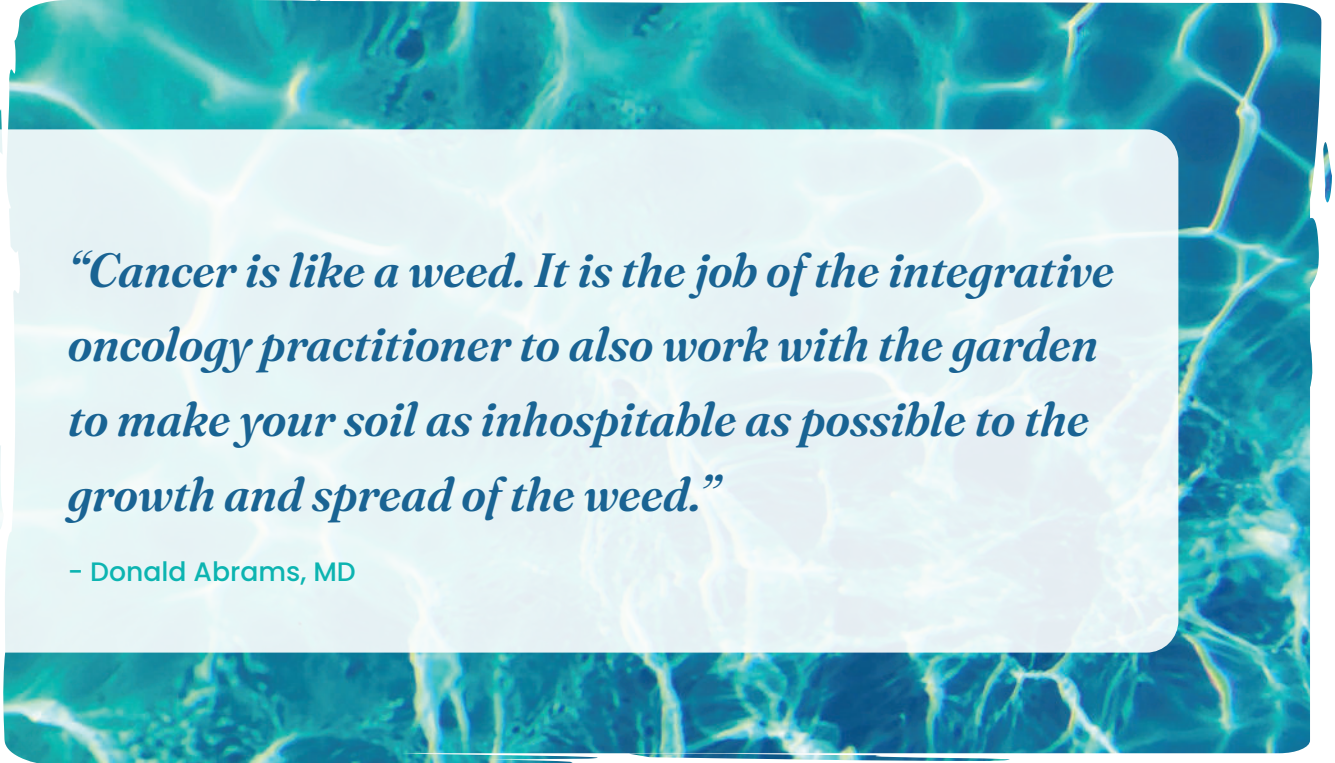
Integrative Oncology Options and Definitions

There are many choices when it comes to complementary practices and/or lifestyle modifications. It is important to know that many of these can help across multiple areas of health and wellness. All terms are defined in the section immediately following [Table 1](#). You can choose methods that best fit your needs. And patients are not expected to use them all – as you read this eBook, see what resonates with you.

Keep in mind that access to these therapies can vary based on where you live, cultural factors, and individual patient needs. See [Section 5](#) for resources and ways to get started.

Also, while most integrative practices have very few side effects and are generally considered safe, there are factors for cancer patients that a qualified professional should consider.

Before adding any complementary practices or lifestyle modifications, patients should talk to their cancer care team to be sure of the safety and appropriateness with their treatment plan.

A microscopic image of cells, showing a network of blue and green structures. A light blue rounded rectangle is overlaid on the image, containing a quote in italics.

“Cancer is like a weed. It is the job of the integrative oncology practitioner to also work with the garden to make your soil as inhospitable as possible to the growth and spread of the weed.”

– Donald Abrams, MD



Table 1: Mind-Body Therapies for Cancer Patients*

“Active” and Typically Led by Instructor	“Passive” and Typically Led by an Instructor	“Passive” and Can Be Practiced by Patients on Their Own After Initial Instruction
Art therapy Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) Music therapy Tai chi and Qi gong Yoga	Acupressure Acupuncture Biofeedback Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** Counseling/ Talk therapy** Hypnosis Medical massage therapy Reflexology	Aromatherapy Guided imagery Mindfulness and Meditation Relaxation therapy Spiritual practice**

* See [Table 2](#) (Section 4) to understand how options in Table 1 help across a fuller set of cancer-related symptoms
 ** Non-drug options typically not seen as complementary or integrative that can be considered by patients based on the available evidence

In addition to mind-body therapies, the following are also a part of integrative oncology:

- Physical Activity/Movement
- Nutritional Counseling
- Natural Products, Herbs, Nutrients, and Supplements

In the next section, there are definitions to understand the basics for each of the integrative oncology options noted above.



Definitions

This section defines some of the various integrative options. Though not always noted, many of these options can also be applied to help with stress management.

For more information about the evidence base, most of these therapies can be found on the CancerChoices “Supplement and Therapies Database” page: <https://cancerchoices.org/resources/reviews-of-complementary-therapies/>

1. Mind-Body Therapies (MBTs)

Slow down and listen inwardly. These time-honored practices and techniques can help you pay attention to what is happening now, learn ways to cope, and make healthy decisions. Mind-body therapies are integrative modalities that help people achieve relaxation and improve overall well-being ^[1,2].

1A. “Active” and Typically Led by Instructor

The following MBTs are considered “active” and led by an instructor, which means the patient is doing an activity beyond speaking and/or engaging in thought and is being guided by a teacher.



Art therapy

Try something new or “pick up where you left off.” This is a hands-on activity or observational experience that uses art to communicate, whether drawing, journaling, painting, sculpting or anything else. It invites self-expression and exploration of feelings. Art therapy aims to decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression, improve quality of life, and help people cope with difficult emotions ^[5].



Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)

These are specific therapeutic approaches that focus on strengthening mindfulness to improve aspects of mental health and overall well-being ^[2]. Unlike general mindfulness, MBIs are typically instructor-led and follow a regimented program. One example is mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), which is a program for a set amount of time that includes regular group classes and individual mindfulness exercises. There are several other types of MBIs.





Music therapy

Listen, sing, chant, and play. Music therapy can involve active listening, playing an instrument, or creating music with guidance from a professionally trained therapist. Music therapy promotes relaxation, distracts from pain, and relieves stress ^[4]. You can listen to music or choose to make it yourself. You can learn to play an instrument or return to a past relationship with an instrument or music.



Tai chi/Qi gong

Tai chi and Qi gong are forms of traditional Chinese mind/body exercises that use slow sets of body movements and controlled breathing with the intention of moving energy throughout the body. They are often taught in a group setting or can also be done alone. Both modalities are shown to improve balance, flexibility, muscle strength and improve overall health ^[3].



Yoga

Yoga is a gentle mind-body practice that originated in ancient India. It combines mindful movement, breathwork, relaxation, and meditation to support both physical and emotional well-being. A regular yoga practice has been shown to reduce stress and fatigue, enhance energy levels, improve sleep quality, alleviate pain, and support emotional well-being, including a reduction in anxiety and depression ^[3]. Group yoga classes are led by registered yoga teachers and focus on physical fitness, relaxation, stress reduction, and general well-being. Individualized yoga therapy sessions are delivered by certified yoga therapists who undergo advanced clinical training to assess specific health needs and design personalized yoga therapy plans using yoga tools.

1B. “Passive” and Typically Led by Instructor

The next set of MBTs are either administered or guided by an instructor and are considered “passive,” meaning the patient’s role is limited to speaking and/or engaging in thought.



Acupressure

Like reflexology, this is a touch therapy that aims to provide the same benefits. Acupressure uses energy lines called meridians that cover the entire body and include 800 pressure points.



Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a common treatment in many cultures and includes placing very thin needles into specific points of the body. Acupuncture has been shown to reduce pain, nausea and vomiting, impaired sleep, anxiety, and depression in cancer patients ^[6].





Biofeedback

Biofeedback seeks to help shift behavior patterns, modify pain, and reduce stress by using external monitors to display neurological (mind) and physiological (body) reactions in response to thoughts and feelings. Observing changes in the body can help with gaining control over physical functions and mental challenges ^[8].



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a psychotherapeutic way to change emotions by changing thoughts, perceptions and behaviors. CBT looks to the here and now (rather than the past) to help people move consciously into the future with purpose, self-agency, meaningful goals, and ongoing support. There is a focus on self-awareness, understanding that the stories people tell themselves and how they interpret the world around them can affect them. This focus promotes self-trust, honesty and self-examination. CBT has been shown to help people with cancer manage several symptoms, including anxiety and depression ^[11].



Counseling/ Talk therapy

Understand and possibly replace unhelpful thoughts that keep resurfacing, confide in another person, or communicate your feelings and thoughts through counseling or “talk therapy.” Psychological counseling uses structured and unstructured conversations to help cancer patients with the emotional and social aspects of cancer, with a focus on the psychosocial needs of the patient and their family ^[12]. A recent meta-analysis has also shown counseling/talk therapy to be effective in alleviating anxiety and depression in cancer patients ^[13].



Hypnosis

Also called hypnotherapy, hypnosis is a state of focused absorption that can be learned by working with a trained professional. It helps people learn self-care techniques to cope with many aspects of life: health, habits, relationships, pain and fears ^[9]. It is an appeal to the subconscious mind where habits and patterns can be overcome with time, where pain and stress can become more manageable.



Medical massage therapy

Human touch itself is a source of healing. Through massage, pressure is applied to the body’s soft tissues, including muscles, tendons, ligaments and connective tissue. Massage therapy uses techniques to loosen and relax tissue and to alleviate pain, reduce anxiety and physical tensions, promote relaxation, and support sleep ^[7].





Reflexology

In reflexology theory, the feet are the crossroads of neural energy transmission throughout the body. Reflexology is the hands-on application of gentle pressure to specific points on the feet, hands, or ears. The goal is to provide relief from specific symptoms^[10], alleviate pain, increase circulation, and relax the mind-body.

1C. “Passive” and Can Be Practiced by Patients on Their Own After Initial Instruction

Finally, the last set of MBTs are “passive” and can be practiced by patients on their own after they have first been taught by a qualified instructor. Once learned, patients can continue these practices on their own.



Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the art and science of using natural aromatic plant extracts to enhance emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing^[15]. The most common aromatic plant extracts are essential oils, carbon dioxide (CO₂) extracts, and hydrosols. Aromatherapy is most often used topically and by inhalation. One example is the use of Lavender essential oil inhalation for patients experiencing anxiety. A multi-center, double-blind, randomized study found *Lavandula angustifolia* (Lavender) essential oil in capsule form (Silexan) reduced anxiety as effectively as Lorazepam^[16]. While there are fewer studies in other areas related to cancer, there is some evidence that essential oils may also have benefits in depression, insomnia, and nausea^[17,18,19].



Guided imagery

Rise above the intensity of the moment and let yourself be guided. Guided imagery is a technique in which a person sees desired images or scenarios in their mind, using all of the senses. By using this method, a person can enter an imagined place or state which often leads to relaxation and a sense of well-being. Guided imagery may be used to relieve symptoms of stress, pain, anxiety and depression^[14].



Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness is the practice of intentionally paying attention to the present moment while being accepting and non-judgmental. Mindfulness is often cultivated through meditation practice, which allows patients to unplug, quiet the mind, honor thoughts, soften and simply “be.” Meditation practice involves focusing the mind by using a combination of mental and physical techniques. It is often accompanied by focusing on the breath. Meditation can be done seated or lying down, walking or in conversation.





Relaxation therapy

Soften the body to quiet the mind and promote healing. Some relaxation techniques are muscle tensing and release (progressive muscle relaxation) and breathing exercises such as body scan. Relaxation can be used along with guided imagery. These can help people find inner peace, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve sleep ^[7].



Spiritual practice

Spirituality elevates the individual sense of self by aligning people to feel connected with “something greater” than themselves, such as a deity and/or the divine, an infinite energy, other people or a community, or an overall sense of wonder. It is an integral aspect of healthcare that attends to people’s shared vulnerability and humanity. Spiritual practice helps patients find meaning in life and explores the realms of death and dying as they cope with the challenges that come with cancer.

“My oncologists are great at focusing on how to get rid of the cancer. I want to use integrative methods to improve my quality of life and help my treatments work better.”

– Anonymous Cancer Patient



2. Physical Activity/Movement

Movement is important for healing and maintaining strength and also has mounting evidence of survival benefit! Physical activity may include simply walking, flexibility, meditative movement, recreational activities, strength training and/or cardiovascular/aerobic aspects. From gentle stretching and isometrics to short sprints and marathons, there is a perfect match for you before, during, and beyond treatment. Your physical, psychological and emotional health are all affected by this. Movement improves your quality of life, lifts your mood, reduces fatigue, and increases strength ^[1,26].

3. Nutritional Counseling

To improve your chances of being excited about food, there are specialists who help select the best diet(s) for you. They can also share ways to prepare food to support healthy appetite, digestion, and elimination. They can guide you on the choices and amount of food to support health during and after cancer treatment ^[20,21]. There is also emerging evidence of the survival benefit of diets rich in plant-based foods ^[22].

4. Natural Products, Herbs, Nutrients, and Supplements

This includes various dietary and plant-based items, often derived from natural products. Some examples include medicinal herbs, mushrooms, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Two items have been shown to be effective in breast cancer patients: ginger can be used to lessen symptoms of nausea and vomiting, and ginseng can be used to counter fatigue ^[23]. While some other items have limited evidence supporting their use for specific symptoms related to cancer, other items in this category are known to interfere with conventional cancer treatments and can cause harm if not used properly.

Please inform your cancer care team and integrative team if you are considering using any natural products, herbs, nutrients, or supplements. [Section 5 includes links to three databases](#) that provide detailed information on items in this category, but your cancer care team should still be consulted before using them.

A note about Cannabis

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is a plant that contains compounds called cannabinoids. There are over 100 known cannabinoids found in Cannabis, and some are psychoactive, meaning they can affect your mind or mood ^[24]. Delta-9- tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is one cannabinoid that has been shown to help cancer patients manage nausea and vomiting related to chemotherapy, when used alongside other treatments under physician guidelines ^[25]. Cannabidiol (CBD) is another cannabinoid that may help with certain cancer-related symptoms, but current evidence is insufficient to support the use of CBD at this time.



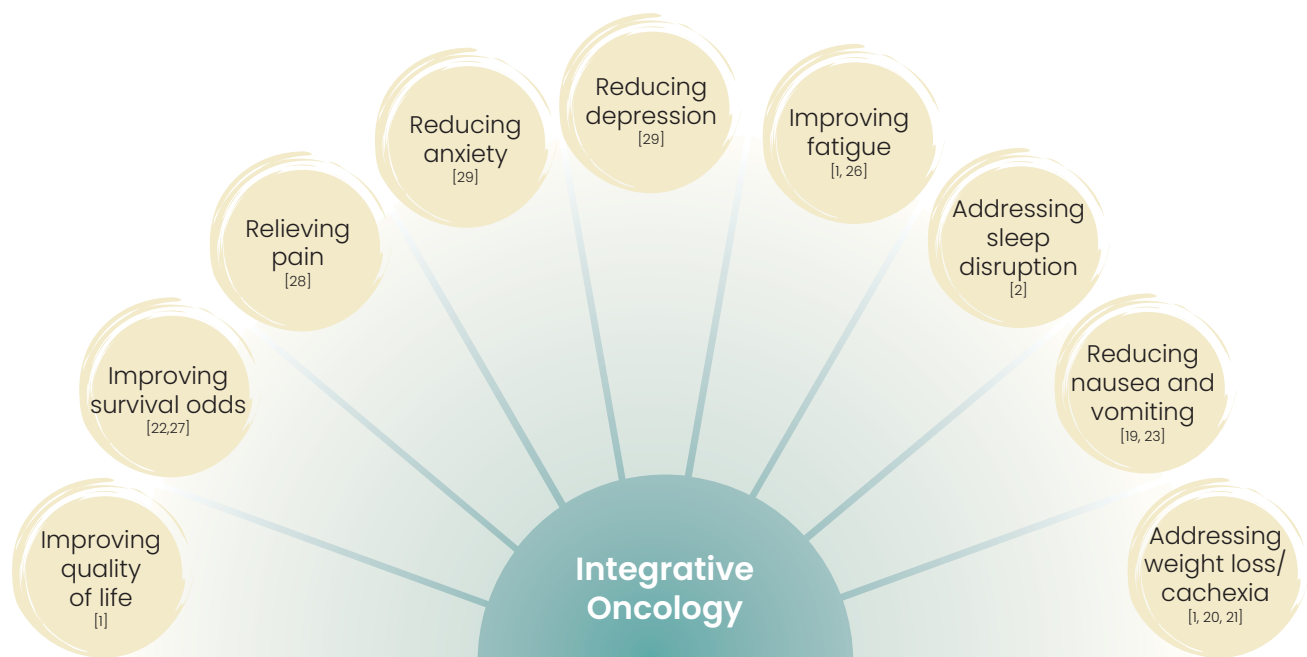
SECTION 3:

SIO-ASCO Guidelines for Integrative Oncology Therapy Usage

Once a person becomes a “patient,” they may start to look for the best treatments to support their care, help manage symptoms, and improve quality of life. During and beyond the early days of diagnosis and discovery, integrative practices will help you keep doing what you love most, with a growing sense of connection and support. As time goes by, integrative oncology can help you grow stronger in mind, body, and spirit.

Specifically, many integrative oncology therapies have been studied in randomized clinical trials, which are the most scientific way to test if the therapy is having an effect. Figure 1 below shows the many benefits to adding complementary practices and lifestyle modifications to conventional medicine:

Figure 1: Benefits of Integrative Oncology



Based on this evidence, several organizations in the US have created guidelines for integrative oncology. The four guidelines depicted in this section have been taken from the Society for Integrative Oncology (SIO) and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) collaborative work.



The full training modules for pain, anxiety, and depression can be found here:
<https://integrativeonc.org/training-modules/>

By reviewing these guidelines, you can learn about and select the best practitioners for yourself, making choices that are best for you. Some people work with therapeutic specialists one-on-one or in groups outside of their cancer care team. Some people choose to pull together a team of integrative practitioners, so everyone can work together to make sure that you are treated as well as possible given your specific condition, symptoms, side effects and interests.

See [Section 5](#) for resources on how to assemble your customized integrative team.

“A whole health approach to cancer care shifts the focus from “What’s the matter with you?” to “What matters to you?”

– Wayne Jonas, MD



Figure 2: Pain SIO–ASCO Guidelines for Integrative Oncology Use ^[28]

SIO and ASCO recommend the following integrative therapies to improve symptoms of pain in patients with cancer:

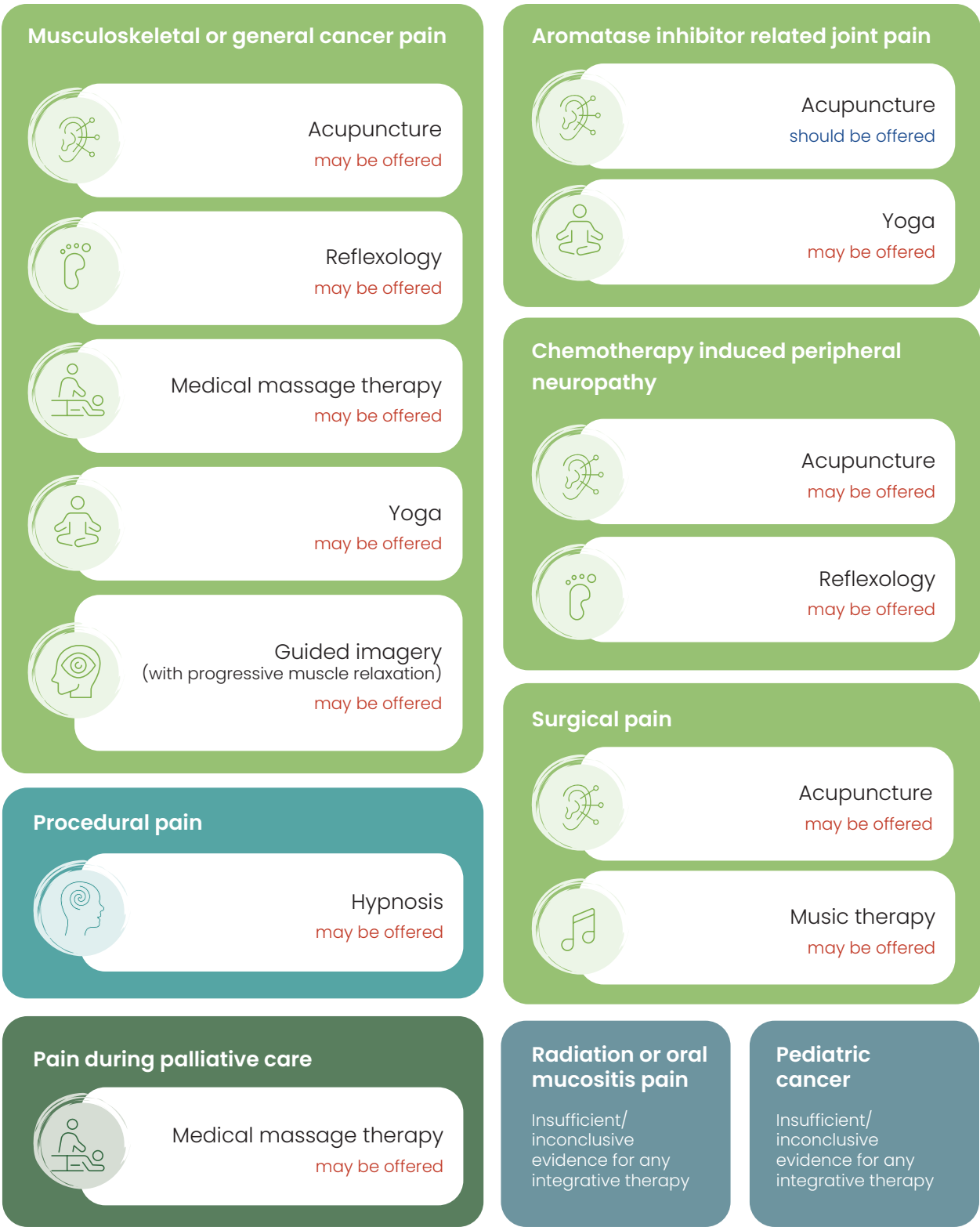


Figure 3: Anxiety SIO–ASCO Guidelines for Integrative Oncology Use ^[29]

SIO and ASCO recommend the following integrative therapies to improve symptoms of anxiety in patients with cancer:

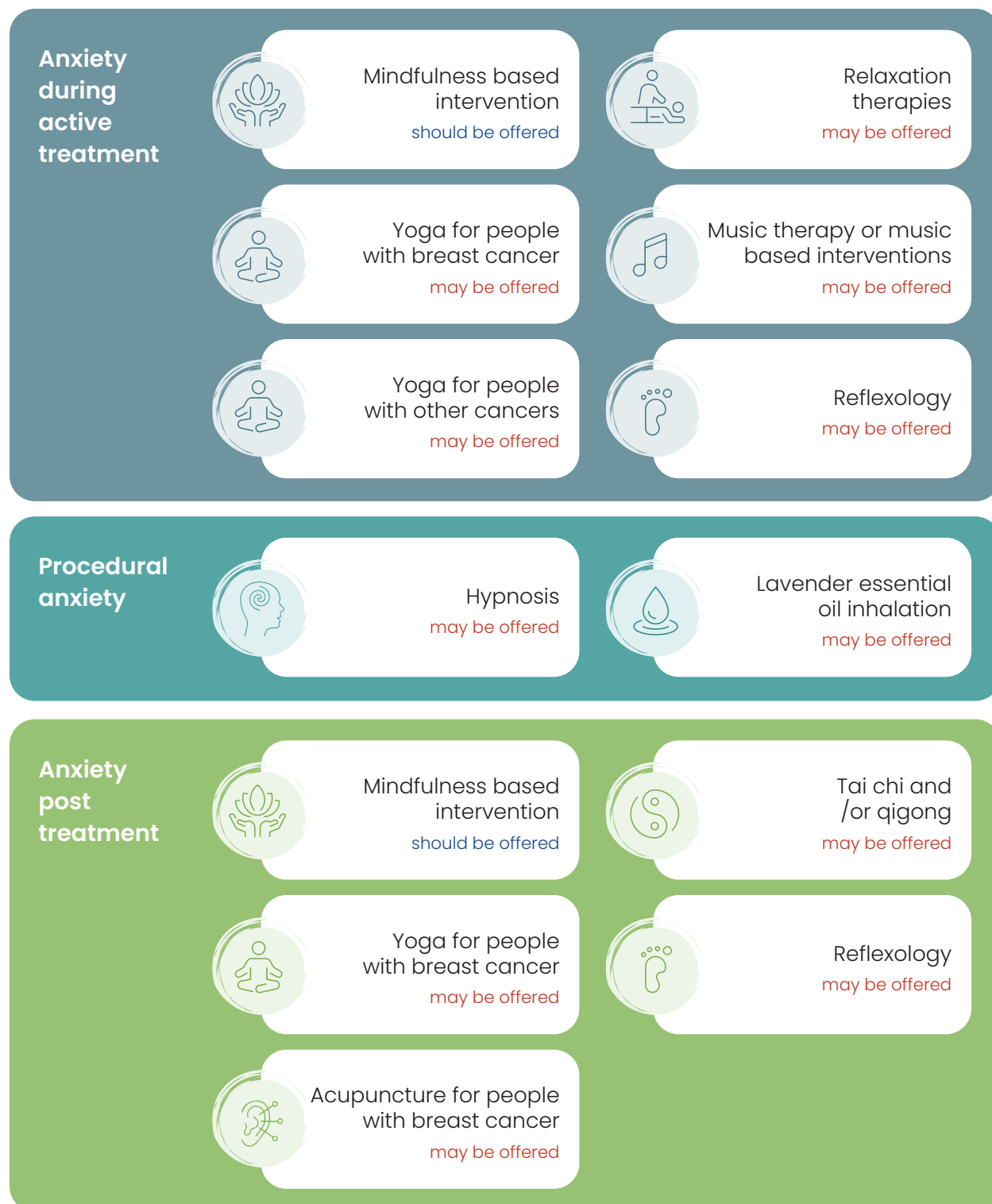
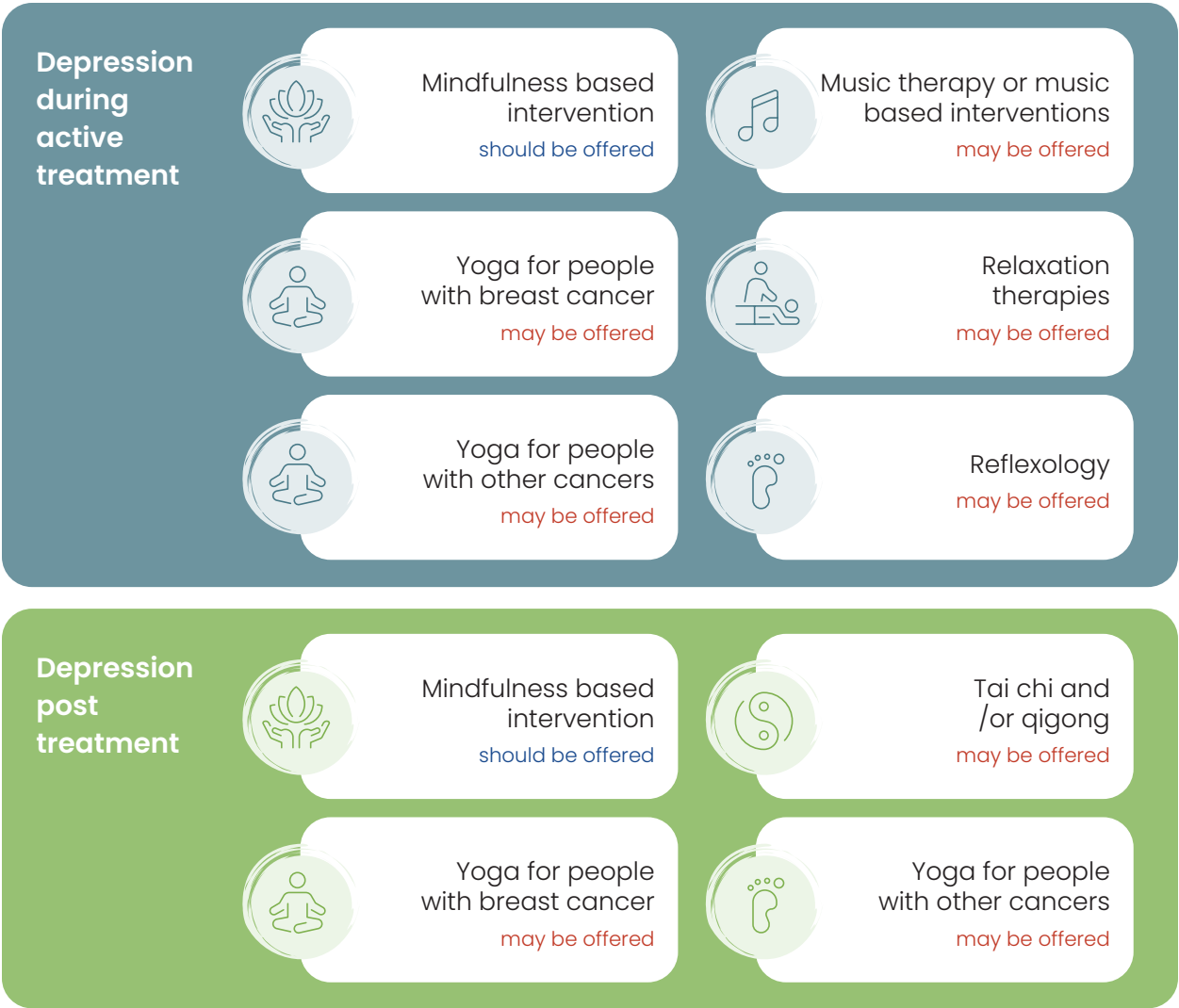


Figure 4: Depression SIO–ASCO Guidelines for Integrative Oncology Use ^[29]

SIO and ASCO recommend the following integrative therapies to improve symptoms of depression in patients with cancer:



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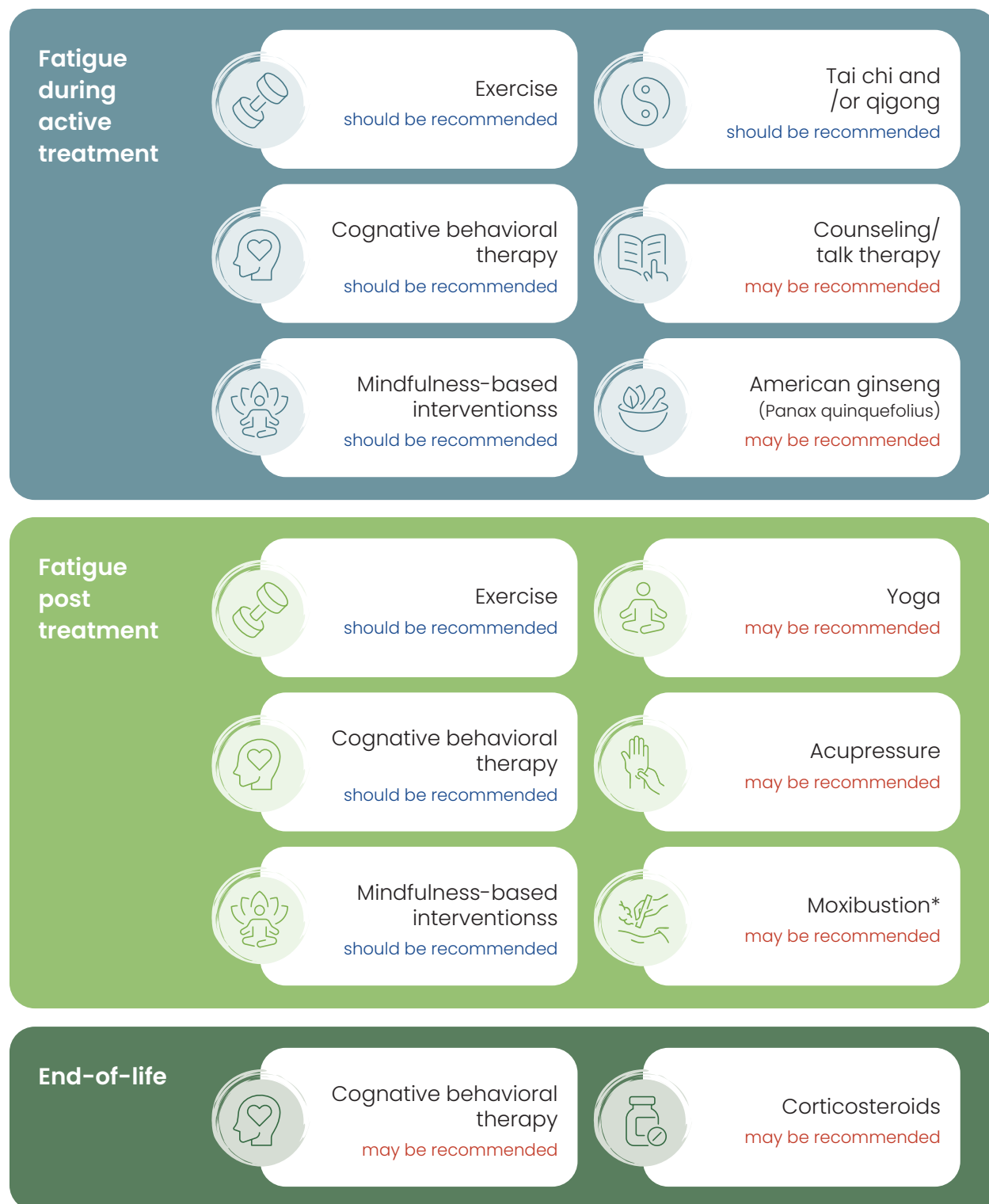
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Figure 5: Fatigue SIO–ASCO Guidelines for Integrative Oncology Use ^[26]

SIO and ASCO recommend the following integrative therapies to improve symptoms of fatigue in patients with cancer.:



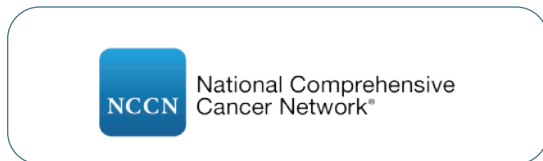
*Moxibustion is the use of mugwort leaves ground into cones called moxa which are lighted and used to warm points on the body.



SECTION 4:

Guideline Summary to Support Additional Symptom Management

In addition to ASCO and SIO, there are two more US-based organizations that provide guidelines for integrative oncology therapy usage:



* NIH stands for the National Institutes of Health, and the NCCIH is a department within the NIH

Each of these organizations have used a vast evidence base to create guidelines, which are updated over time. To help patients manage symptoms that come with cancer and cancer treatment, each integrative therapy is listed in [Table 2](#) along with the symptoms it helps with. This table includes the most recent information across all four organizations.

When reviewing Table 2, please keep in mind:

- SIO does not provide individual patient referrals or treatment recommendations. Patients should always consult with their cancer care team about adding any evidence-informed integrative or complementary therapies to their care plan.
- Clinical trials across different cancer types were used where possible. However, some evidence is based on trials with one cancer type, with breast cancer the most common.
- Just because a therapy shown does not have a symbol, that does not mean it does not have the potential to be helpful. The lack of a symbol means there has not been enough evidence shown to meet the rules for inclusion in the guidelines.

“It is more important to know what sort of patient has a disease than what disease a patient has.”

– Moses Maimonides and Sir William Osler



Table 2: Integrative choices to support symptom management for cancer patients

Modality	Symptoms						
	Pain	Anxiety	Depression	Fatigue	Sleep Disruption	Nausea & Vomiting	Weight Loss/ Cachexia
Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) ^[2]	△	✓	✓	✓	△		
Music therapy ^[4]	✓	✓	✓			△	
Tai chi and Qi gong ^[3]		✓	✓	✓			
Yoga ^[3]	✓	✓	✓	✓	△	△	
Acupressure ^[26]	△			✓		△	
Acupuncture ^[3,6]	✓	✓	△	△		△	
Biofeedback ^[8]	△			△	△	△	
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) ^[11]	△	△	△	✓	△	△	
Counseling/ Talk therapy ^[12,13]		○	○				
Hypnosis ^[9]	✓	✓		△		△	
Medical massage therapy ^[7]	✓	△	△	△			
Reflexology ^[10]	✓	✓	✓				
Aromatherapy ^[16]		✓					
Guided imagery ^[14]	✓					△	
Relaxation therapy ^[7]	△	✓	✓	△	△	△	
Physical Activity/ Movement ^[1,26]	△	△	△	✓	△		
Nutritional Counseling ^[20-22]	△			△			△
Cannabis ^[25]						△	

✓ Included in the ASCO-SIO joint guidelines (at any level of recommendation)

△ Included in the ASCO, NCCN, and/or NCCIH guidelines (at any level of recommendation)

○ Not included in any guidelines, but very recent meta-analysis to support ^[13]



SECTION 5:

Resources and Tips for Getting Started with Integrative Practices

How do I start to add integrative oncology into my care?

The good news is there are many resources, tools, and practices you can try – some for little or no cost. Finding the right ones can help you realize many of the benefits. It is understood that not everyone everywhere has the same access to these treatments. Hopefully, by using these resources, you can get better access. You will have to put in a little time and effort to follow the steps below, but the results can be amazing for your physical, mental, and emotional health. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

1. Talk to your oncologist!

Most health systems in the US have information on at least some complementary or lifestyle practices. As a first step, talk with your oncologist or cancer care team using [The Integrative Oncology Discussion Guide for Cancer Care Teams](#) in the Appendix of this document. Ask your oncologist who on their staff can help with integrative therapies – and then ask the oncology nurse, nurse navigator, social worker, or any professional you have access to. Keep asking until you get an answer you are satisfied with.

Many conventional oncology providers are not yet familiar with the SIO-ASCO guideline recommendations, so you may have to show them the guidelines.

2. Try to find ways to focus on you!

If you feel like you are the one always helping others, remember that you cannot do your best at helping others if you are not well. Taking the time to invest in your care and future health helps you and those you take care of. See the infographic at the end for ways to find time to work integrative practices into your life.

In many cases, your support network wants to help you, but they don't know how to help. If you can give them ideas for how they can help support your preferred integrative therapies, they will feel better equipped to help. Think about if friends and family can help give you a ride, find a provider, watch your children, or crowdsource funding.

3. Stick with it!

Try a new therapy or activity for at least 2-3 weeks or several visits. Give yourself time to try it at least a few times and some follow-up time to allow the positive effects to be felt. All new activities have a learning curve and you will learn about yourself as you learn a new practice. New activities



can feel uncomfortable or even hard to sit through. Remind yourself of why you are doing this and that caring for yourself takes time and practice.

If you still do not like it, then try another therapy or activity that will help you get to the same benefit. For example, many mind-body therapies have similar benefits, so if one modality doesn't fit your style or you don't have access, try another.

How do I find the right care team?

What if I already have a cancer care team in place?

It is important to find a care team that is a good fit for your personality and needs. Even if the health system you go to is not labeled with the term “integrative,” they may support integrative practices and have professionals that can help. On the other hand, just because a system is labeled as “integrative” does not mean it will have everything that every patient needs.

[The Integrative Oncology Discussion Guide for Cancer Care Teams](#) in the Appendix of this document has questions you can ask your cancer care team whether you are just starting out, or if you have already started with one health system and are looking for options. Remember, you are a key person in decisions about your own care. You are your own greatest advocate. Here are some ideas to get you started based on where you are:

A

I am just starting out/do not have a cancer care team yet: if you have access to the Internet, checking a health system's website is a good place to start. Do they have resources dedicated to oncology patients? Do they show integrative therapies? Do they have a psychosocial or counseling service? Do the messages and images resonate with you? When you visit in person for the first time, keep these same ideas in mind.

B

I have a cancer care team in place, or I have a health system in mind, but I want to explore other medical professionals that specialize in integrative methods: as described in [Section 1](#), there are other medical professionals that can complement the care you get from your health system. Naturopaths and osteopaths are physicians, while chiropractors and physical therapists acquire other advanced degrees. They, as well as physician assistants (PA's) and nurse practitioners (NP's) may specialize in integrative modalities to help you coordinate the lifestyle and complementary part of your integrative care. Consider what professionals fit your needs, and check the directories below to locate the ones closest to you.

C

I have a cancer care team, but want to explore an oncologist second opinion: oncologists and cancer care teams that are truly focused on the good of the patient will not be upset by you seeking a second opinion. Chances are that your oncologist has also been the one called on for a second opinion by other patients. It is a normal part of cancer care, at least in the US. There are many websites that have lists of health systems and oncologists involved in integrative oncology, shown on next page. These lists are again a good starting point, but they are not the only options.



SIO does not endorse any specific health systems, treatment centers, or individual practitioners. These lists are provided as references only, not as recommendations.

Lists of US health systems/ oncologists that are involved in integrative oncology



- **Description:** List of 66 cancer centers in the US that have been designated by the National Cancer Institute. CancerChoices also verifies that these centers either provide information about and/ or have integrative medicine programs or offer classes in lifestyle changes or complementary practices.
- **Limitations:** Integrative cancer centers do not have to be NCI designated; this is just one level of qualification.

<https://cancerchoices.org/resources/cancer-handbooks/how-to-integrate-your-choices/cancer-centers/>

Research for Wellness

- **Description:** List of 100+ health systems by US state that offer integrative health and wellness services or programs.
- **Limitations:** Good list, but still does not include every health system with any form of integrative oncology.

<https://www.researchforwellness.com/health-centers>



- **Description:** List of naturopathic doctors board certified in oncology as Fellows of the American Board of Naturopathic Oncology (FABNO) and those with special interest.
- **Limitations:** If considering professionals that are not FABNO-certified, be cautious of those using the term "naturopath" and ask about the evidence base of their recommendations and their oncology experience.

<https://www.oncanp.org/find-an-nd#!directory/map>

Lists across several countries of health systems or individuals involved in integrative medicine

- Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health
<https://imconsortium.org/page/member-listing>
- Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine – The University of Arizona
<https://awcim.arizona.edu/publicListingSearch/fip.html>



Keep in mind that there are also many professionals in your community or online (see resources below). There may also be nonprofit organizations, cancer advocacy groups or cancer support communities that offer integrative services free of charge. Here are a few tips for when you are considering different medical and community-based professionals:



When considering different medical and community-based professionals:

Do your research

- Check out their website and see how patient-focused it is
- Look for testimonials from other people/patients, or better yet, ask your cancer care team if they can put you in touch with someone that they treated in the recent past so that you can ask about the direct experience

Get started safely

- For medical professionals, they should have a degree or certification with the term “oncology” and/or “integrative” included
- For professionals in the community like yoga teachers or massage therapists it’s a good idea to work with professionals who have experience supporting people with cancer, so they can make any needed changes to the practice to keep it safe and comfortable for you. When possible, SIO recommends seeing professionals with oncology training, though it is recognized this is not always possible

Be prepared to modify, and be sure your medical professional/instructor is OK with this

- For example, if you have had surgery or biopsy recently, you may need to avoid certain exercises, yoga positions, and areas for massage
- For yoga specifically, group yoga classes and individualized yoga therapy should both allow you to modify, but the individualized approach may be especially helpful in managing your specific side effects of cancer treatment or addressing complex medical conditions

Communicate with your oncologist, cancer care team, and integrative team

- Before starting any new activity, please consult with your oncologist
- Inform your cancer care team and integrative team if you have a medical device implanted, have low levels of white blood cells or platelets, or have had recent treatments like chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery



Beyond my health system, what resources are there online or in my community?

Based on where you live, there may be professionals within your community. If there are not, some programs can be accessed online. Either way, the lists below are meant to be a starting point. You may find more local options by doing a little research online or asking your cancer care team.

Lists of community-based integrative oncology providers (likely requires payment)

- Oncology Massage: Preferred Practitioner Directory | S4OM
https://www.s4om.org/resources/preferred-practitioners/?_practitioners=-67.411568%2C-180%2C79.59043%2C180
- Yoga Teacher Directory from the Yoga Alliance
<https://r.yogaalliance.org/Directory?Type=Teacher>
- Yoga Therapist Directory from the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT)
<https://www.iayt.org/search/custom.asp?id=4160>
- Acupuncture: Find a Practitioner Directory | NCCAOM
<https://www.nccaom.org/find-a-practitioner-directory/>
- Tai Chi: Find Tai Chi Instructors | Tai Chi for Health Institute
<https://taichiforhealthinstitute.org/instructors/>
- Qi Gong: Qigong Institute: Directory of Qigong Teachers and Therapists
<https://www.qigonginstitute.org/directory>
- Talk Therapy/Psychotherapy: Find a Therapist, Psychologist, Counselor – Psychology Today
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/?msockid=0b89dd8eab87634e0b28ce5faac862f6>
- Music Therapy: American Music Therapy Association (AMTA)
<https://www.musictherapy.org/>
- Aromatherapy: Home | NAHA
www.naha.org

Free exercise program while in active treatment

- YMCA LiveStrong Program: Livestrong at the YMCA | Livestrong
<https://livestrong.org/how-we-help/livestrong-at-the-ymca/>

Low cost exercise and yoga programs for people with cancer

- Fit Together
<https://www.fittogethertraining.org/>

Nutrition and healthy recipes

- Free Recipes: Fred Hutch Cook for Your Life
<https://www.cookforyourlife.org/>

Free health check that includes nutrition and activity details

- Cancer Health Check – American Institute for Cancer Research
<https://www.aicr.org/cancer-health-check/>
-



Offer free online programs (ex: yoga, mindfulness, etc.)

- Anticancer Lifestyle Program
<https://anticancerlifestyle.org>
- oncio (also available as an app)
<https://www.ocio.org>
- Yoga Bridge Yoga for Cancer Online Classes
www.yogabridge.org
- Dana Farber free videos on YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPLXayOtubE10vhpmu_XjacPRUtwRofH5
- Memorial Sloan Kettering free meditation videos
<https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/multimedia/meditations>
- Free integrative therapies and personalized care
<https://www.dempseycenter.org>
- Free meditation for all levels of experience, also an app
<https://www.sattva.life>
- Meditation to ease pain
<https://healingworksfoundation.org/guided-imagery/a-meditation-to-help-ease-pain/-meditation-to-ease-pain/>
- Mindfulness practice
<https://www.centeredinthecity.org>
- Free online support groups
<https://healingcirclesglobal.org/cancer/>
- SIO's YouTube video content
<https://www.youtube.com/@integrativeonc>

Offer free patient view of the US treatment guidelines and/or other supportive resources

- Outcomes4Me free app with personalized guidelines, tools, and resources
<https://outcomes4me.com>
- American Cancer Society free app with numerous resources
<https://www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services/acs-cares.html>
- NCCN guidelines for patients
<https://www.nccn.org/guidelines/patients>

Supplements (free or paid databases)

- CancerChoices database is free and includes both supplements and other therapies
<https://cancerchoices.org/resources/reviews-of-complementary-therapies/>
- MSK About Herbs Database is a free online databases to look up information and interactions
<https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/herbs/search>
- KNOW natural medicines database is a subscription for a fee, can be used by individuals or organizations, and can checks for drug interactions
<https://knowintegrativeoncology.org/>



OK, so now I know how to get started – but how can I afford these complementary practices? Are any low cost or free, or are there ways to help with paying for them?

First, not all in-person or online programs are expensive; many have modest fees and some are totally free. For example, many yoga studios offer sliding scales and/or “scholarships” to help make programming affordable. Remember, learning integrative techniques and practices may not need a big financial investment, because you are learning how to take better care of yourself overall, not just during the sessions. It’s incredibly empowering.

Second, there are some resources to help you get some of these therapies for low or even no cost. You may have to do a little work to get financial aid, but it can be very rewarding. Also, check if your health insurance covers integrative therapies. Some plans have started to cover massage and acupuncture during active treatment, for example. Here are some additional resources:

Multi-country

- Anticancer Lifestyle Program
<https://anticancerlifestyle.org/>

US-specific

- Managing Cancer Care – National Cancer Institute
<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/managing-care/track-care-costs>
- Support Services Locator – National Cancer Institute
<https://supportorgs.cancer.gov/home.aspx?js=1>
- Nancy’s List
<https://nancyslist.org/financial-assistance/>
- Financial & Co-Payment Assistance for Cancer Patients
https://cancercare.org/financial_assistance



And, here are a few more tips for low-cost or free ways to boost your integrative oncology care:

**"I have no money to invest –
how can I get started for low or no cost?"**

**Body –
Exercise**



Walking is a great form of exercise, and it is free and can be done nearly anywhere.

- "But walking is so boring" – play a game (which house, find something blue, identify the tree or building), switch up your route, alternate music/audio book/talking to a friend/listening to nature.
- Find little tricks – like park in that spot further away, take the stairs rather than the elevator.
- Other activities like swimming, biking, running, and hiking can be low-cost at local community centers.

**Body –
Nutrition**



Veggies and fruit are usually less expensive at a Farmer's Market. Or join a local co-op.

And, read labels to make mindful choices:

- Look for choices with less than 5g added sugar per serving.
- Look for ingredients you can pronounce and picture in your pantry (if not, it is probably a chemical additive that you do not need).

Mind



Mindfulness is free and can be practiced almost any time.

- Stay in the moment – focus on what you are doing right now and give it your full attention.
- Try not to judge – keep your mindset positive.
- Start or end your day with a gratitude practice – three things you are grateful for.
- Try re-framing – rather than seeing a situation as a negative, try looking from a different view to find the positive.

Soul



Most of the things that feed our soul can be free with a little effort.

- Surround yourself with people who are positive; consider distancing from the detractors.
- Spend time with family and friends, living in the moment.
- Practice your chosen religion/faith.

**Work
Programs**



Some employers have started working with insurance companies to offer financial help.

Check if your employer offers:

- Wellness programs for free (examples: nutrition/ weight loss, yoga classes).
- Reimbursement for wellness items like gym memberships, wearable fitness devices, etc.



This all sounds great, but I am a busy person with no time for new things. How can I work integrative oncology into my schedule?



Practical ways to find or make time

- Look for “new time” opportunities to convert into self-care time.
 - *Like when your kids start going to school all day, or if your commute time shortens.*
- Try finding “bang for your buck” and get creative.
 - *Take a few steps while waiting at the bus stop, or while in the room waiting for the doctor to come in.*
 - *Work out when your kids are at their sporting activities, or while you are watching your favorite show.*
- Put it on your calendar and make it a priority!
 - *Block two 15–30 minute break times each day.*
 - *Or, many CEOs block a half day each week, or a couple of hours twice a week to keep up on self-care.*
- Alleviate some of your time stress by asking friends for help with grocery shopping or other errands.
- Ask other parents to carpool to kid activities.



Solutions that can be done in small chunks

- There are paid meditation apps that have 10-minute meditations and other bite-size wellness actions that really add up.
- Stretch with mindful breathing in the morning for 15–20 minutes.
- If seated a lot for work or school, get up and take 250 steps each hour (~3 minutes).
- Kitchen sink practice: hold the sink, straighten your arms and stretch back; lift and lower your heels, relax your head and jaw, breathe deeply with a soft belly.
- Sit or walk out in the sun for 10 minutes a day



Simple techniques that can be done almost anytime

- Practice mindfulness during any and all activities.
- Practice gentle forward bends and back bends, the inversion alleviates stress and can reduce pain, and the backbends help release endorphins that give you energy!
- Use breathing as a simple calming technique: Simply taking a longer exhalation calms the body and quiets the mind. Breathing through the nose is a natural anti-inflammatory!

In conclusion, integrative oncology can help people affected by cancer at all stages. There are many methods to try, and they help with managing various symptoms, improving quality of life and survival odds, and other long-term wellness goals. Adding integrative oncology into your care takes some effort, but it is incredibly empowering and beneficial. The information and resources in this eBook can help you be an active part of your treatment and wellness.



A Special Note: Palliative Care, End-of-Life Planning, and Hospice

Terms like “palliative” and “hospice” are not always explained well, and they are sometimes confused. Learning the difference will help you decide what is best for your care or your loved one, which may change over time.

Palliative Care

Palliative treatments include services that can be given at any time of life. They help each person with the goal of alleviating pain and suffering and attending to symptoms rather than causes. When people struggle physically or emotionally, physiologically or spiritually, palliative care provides perspective, clinical support, medication and/or other options to improve quality of life. Examples are: nutritional support, pain and stress management, physical and occupational therapies, individual and group counseling/talk therapy, personal planning for the future, home healthcare, and others. The services move from home, to hospital, to rehab and when necessary, hospice.

End-of-Life Planning

Everyone needs to take time to look ahead and plan as best they can for the end of their lives – medically, legally, financially, and personally. Working with specialists or on your own, there are many ways to plan wisely and courageously to create living wills and/or trusts, medical directives, and prepare documents for loved ones in advance. Going through this process is a way to have your wishes heard and documented, and it can take away the burden from loved ones to make difficult decisions. Thinking through the possibilities with medical professionals, family members, and friends gives you a chance to make meaningful choices about what comes next, giving you control over that which can possibly be controlled.

Hospice

Hospice care is available to individuals and their families who are approaching the end of life and need of ongoing support during this time. Although a majority of patients only remain in hospice for 6 months or less, some live in and with “hospice” for a very long time depending upon the nature of their condition. Palliative care works hand-in-hand with hospice providers to promote comfort and dignity during this transitional phase of life, frequently sending emotional support staff and medical personnel into people’s homes, in hospital settings, and at stand-alone hospice centers.



Appendix: Integrative Oncology Discussion Guide for Cancer Care Teams

Whether you have received a recent diagnosis, are in active treatment, or are a survivor, it's never too late to think about adding complementary practices and lifestyle modifications. A good place to start is with your cancer care team. Defined in [Section 1](#), the cancer care team includes all of the professionals you see when you visit your location for conventional cancer care such as (but not limited to): Medical Oncologists, Hematology Oncologists, Radiation Oncologists, Surgical Oncologists, Oncology Nurses, Nurse Navigators, Rehabilitation Specialists, Psychologists, and Social Workers.

If you are just starting out, some questions for your oncologist/cancer care team

- Are there lifestyle changes I should consider to support my treatment and recovery?
 - Are there ways to keep up my energy levels or reduce side effects during treatment?
 - Can you connect me with supportive resources, such as nutritionists, mental health counselors, integrative medicine providers, or support groups?
 - Do you have resources for managing stress, anxiety, or other emotions I might feel?
 - What is the importance of keeping moving while I go through treatment?
-

If you are talking to a cancer care team member who is not supportive, ways to re-frame the questions

- Being actively involved in my cancer treatment is important to me. Other than following the procedures and medications you recommend, what can I do to have the best outcomes possible?
 - I have heard there are guidelines from the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) for using integrative practices with cancer patients. Can you help me understand how these guidelines apply to me?
 - If you are not able to connect me with supportive resources, are there other members of the staff here that may be able to help me?
 - Or, are there any cancer advocacy groups or non-profit organizations you are aware of that could help me with resources to help my well-being as I go through treatment?
-

If you are talking to a care team member who is supportive, additional questions

- Are there specific complementary therapies or lifestyle modifications you recommend for me?
- Does this location offer supportive tools, resources, or classes for cancer patients? Which ones, when are they offered, and is there a cost?
- If not at this location, are you aware of any other integrative services offered through this health system, or through community or non-profit organizations?
- Do you have staff members who can help me find out if my health insurance will pay for any part of complementary practices or lifestyle modifications?



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My Integrative Oncology Notes

Complementary practices and lifestyle modifications I am most interested in:

Questions I have for my doctors and practitioners:

How I will make time for incorporating into my life:

Which free therapies I will use, or how I will make sure I am able to use some therapies that cost money:

Other notes:

