

Complementary therapies

This information is about [complementary therapies](#). Complementary therapies are treatments that people may use with, or as well as, conventional medical treatments.

There are many reasons why people use complementary therapies. Some people find that complementary therapies may help them cope with the stress of cancer and its treatments. For some people, using complementary therapies can be a positive way of looking after themselves and improving their quality of life. You can do some complementary therapies as part of a group. This can be a good way to meet other people with similar experiences, in a positive setting.

There are many different complementary therapies. The main groups are:

- [mind-body therapies](#), for example relaxation and mindfulness
- massage and other [touch therapies](#), for example shiatsu and reflexology
- [acupuncture](#)
- homeopathy
- [therapies using herbs and plants](#), for example aromatherapy
- [therapies using supplements](#) or diet.

Complementary therapies should not claim that they can treat or cure cancer.

Things to think about

- When choosing a [complementary therapy](#), you might want to think about what you would like and how it may help you.
- If you plan to use a complementary therapy, it is important to talk to your doctor or specialist nurse. Some therapies may not be suitable if you are having certain cancer treatments. Ask whether the treatment you would like could affect your cancer treatment, make your cancer treatment less effective or make side effects of your cancer treatment worse.
- If you already use a complementary therapy, make sure you tell your cancer doctor about it before you start cancer treatment.
- Some herbal medicines, supplements and other products can affect how some cancer treatments work. Just because they are 'natural', this does not mean that they cannot interact with a cancer treatment.
- Some complementary therapies are free through the NHS, [cancer information and support centres](#) or large cancer charities. But complementary therapies can be expensive. The costs can vary a lot, so check how much you need to pay before you start treatment.
- Make sure you have the information you need about the complementary therapy you are interested in. Talk about it with your cancer doctor or specialist nurse.
- Be careful when choosing what to read or believe on the internet. Some books and websites make claims that are not supported by evidence. Others may be selling products to make money.
- When choosing a complementary therapist, always use a qualified therapist who is on a statutory or accredited register.
- Ask the therapist how many years of training they have had, how long they have been practising and what training and experience they have had with complementary therapies and cancer. Some therapists may not treat someone with cancer if they have not had training to help them work safely with you.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on orders.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- MAC11645 [Cancer and complementary therapies](#)
- MAC16306 [Complementary therapies](#) – Easy read

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk to [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the [Relay UK app](#). Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

If you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council – visit www.cnhc.org.uk
- Professional Standards Authority – visit www.professionalstandards.org.uk
- NHS Complementary and alternative medicine – visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/complementary-and-alternative-medicine

Notes and questions
