



Ovarian cancer and complementary therapies

This booklet aims to provide information and signposting about the use of complementary therapies for women who have received an ovarian cancer diagnosis. It discusses what complementary therapies are and where you can find more information and support if you are thinking about using them alongside your other treatment.

What are complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies are treatments carried out by trained practitioners which can be used **alongside** and **in addition to** conventional medical treatments (such as surgery and chemotherapy). No complementary therapies should replace your medical treatment but some people use complementary therapies to help them relax or to ease symptoms and side effects alongside their conventional cancer treatment. Complementary therapies do not claim to cure cancer. Some complementary therapies have been scientifically tested to check how effective and safe they are.

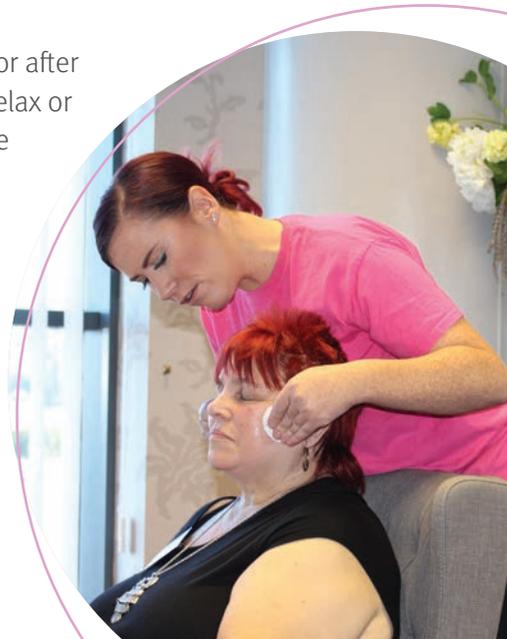
If you want to use complementary therapies alongside your cancer treatment it is essential that you use a registered therapist and always keep your clinical team aware. You should also tell your complementary therapist about your cancer treatment. This is because some therapies may interact with your conventional cancer treatments to make them work less well or increase the side effects. Most doctors will support you using a complementary therapy if they think it's safe for you.

What are alternative therapies?

Often the terms ‘complementary therapy’ and ‘alternative therapy’ are used as if they mean the same thing. However, alternative therapies are frequently used **instead** of conventional treatments. Most alternative therapies have not been through rigorous trials so they may not be completely safe and could cause harm. There is some evidence to suggest that opting for alternative therapies instead of conventional cancer treatment has a negative impact on survival. Some alternative therapists may claim to be able to cure your cancer but there is no scientific or medical evidence to show that alternative therapies can cure cancer.

What types of complementary therapies can I access?

There are many different complementary therapies which may be used alongside or after your hospital treatments to help you to relax or to ease symptoms and side effects. Some complementary therapies are common (like massage or acupuncture) and some you may not have heard of before. Some women find that these therapies may improve their mood and may help with different problems like sickness and pain.



Some of the common types of complementary therapies are:

- **Acupuncture** involves placing fine sterile needles into the body at particular points. This is thought to stimulate the nerves. Acupuncture is used to help reduce symptoms of ovarian cancer such as pain and side effects of treatment such as sickness caused by some ovarian cancer drugs. Western medical acupuncture is based on scientific research and can be used alongside conventional cancer treatments. It is advised that you avoid acupuncture if you have low immunity or lymphoedema.
- **Aromatherapy** is the use of natural oils extracted from plants (known as essential oils) to promote wellbeing and relieve stress. Some people use aromatherapy because it makes them feel good although more research is needed to learn how aromatherapy can help. Aromatherapy can be used alongside conventional cancer treatments but it is essential to find a qualified aromatherapist as some essential oils can cause skin irritation when used alongside some cancer drugs.
- **Massage therapy** is a form of structured touch that involves stroking, kneading, tapping or pressing the soft tissues of the body. It is promoted as a natural way to help people relax and cope with stress and pain. There are several different types of massage and therapists may treat your whole body or concentrate on a specific part such as your shoulders or neck. Massage therapists working with people with cancer must be properly trained.
- **Reiki** means ‘universal energy’ and is based on the idea that there is an energy that flows through all living things. Reiki practitioners will put their hands on or slightly above your body and will seek to change and balance the energy fields in and around you by moving their hands across your body. Some people use Reiki to promote physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and it is safe to have Reiki alongside your ovarian cancer treatment.

- **Tai Chi** is a form of physical activity that integrates mental concentration and breathing control. It has been described as moving meditation and centres around breathing exercises with the combination of motion and stillness. Some people use Tai Chi to help ease pain and reduce stiffness as regular practice improves flexibility, strength and balance.
- **Yoga** is a whole body philosophy that involves meditation and postures to promote flexibility and relax your mind and body. Some people use yoga because it makes them feel good and helps them to cope with stress. Yoga can sometimes help you to move around more quickly and easily after surgery for cancer.
- **Reflexology** is an energy-based therapy based on the idea that different areas on the feet or hands are connected to different parts of the body. Gentle pressure is applied to specific points on the feet or hands with the aim of making you feel more relaxed. Some people use reflexology to improve symptoms such as sickness and pain.

Where can I access complementary therapies?

Most hospitals have links with a local cancer support centre which may offer a range of complementary therapies onsite for free, or you may want to enquire at your local hospice about the services they offer. You can also speak to your Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) about complementary therapies as they will be happy to talk about these with you.



If you found this booklet useful, visit our website for more information and our full range of ovarian cancer guides targetovariancancer.org.uk

“When I started having chemotherapy, my local cancer support centre offered me acupuncture which helped with nausea and vomiting. I also had a course of Reiki which was really helpful. It made me feel calmer and less anxious. I still have Reiki three and a half years on and have done level 1 training myself. This has also supported me to meditate and use mindfulness. I feel I have helped my heart and soul while the medics take care of my body.”

Julia

Where can I find out more?

- Target Ovarian Cancer’s nurse-led Support Line offers confidential information, support and signposting for anyone with questions about ovarian cancer. You can call us on **020 7923 5475** (Monday – Friday from 9am to 5.30pm) or visit **targetovariancancer.org.uk/supportline**.
- Our guides for women with ovarian cancer offer expert advice, practical information and emotional support on a wide range of issues at all stages. You can order your copies online at **targetovariancancer.org.uk/guides** or by calling **020 7923 5475**.
- We also have comprehensive listings of other sources of support on our website – **targetovariancancer.org.uk**

- Cancer Research UK has very thorough information about different types of complementary therapies on its website: **cancerresearchuk.org**
- Penny Brohn Cancer Care provides complementary care to people with cancer and their loved ones: **pennybrohn.org.uk** or call **0303 3000 118** for signposting to other wellbeing services across the country.
- Maggie's Centres offer care and support to people affected by cancer: **maggiescentres.org**
- The British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA) has a searchable databased of therapists and therapy associations: **bcma.co.uk**
- The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) is the UK regulator for complementary healthcare practitioners: **cnhc.org.uk** or **020 3668 0406**.
- The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) keep a register of health and care professionals who meet their standards for training, professional skills, behaviour and health: **hpc-uk.org** or **0300 500 6184**.
- The Institute for Complementary and Natural Medicine provides information about specific complementary therapies: **icnm.org.uk**
- The Research Council for Complementary Medicine collects and reviews research into the effectiveness of complementary therapies: **rccm.org.uk**
- The Complementary and Alternative Medicines in Cancer Consortium aims to provide reliable information on complementary and alternative medicines relating to cancer: **cam-cancer.org**
- The Therapy Directory puts people in touch with professionals who are qualified and suitable for their needs: **therapy-directory.org.uk** or **0333 325 2505**.

Find out more

Get in touch for more information, support and signposting for anyone affected by ovarian cancer. Why not register with us to be the first to receive news about our information and events?



Support Line: 020 7923 5475



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