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## Cancer Treatment Terminology and Information Resources

Terms associated with healthcare therapies, including medical or clinical, investigational, complementary, integrative, unproven, alternative and quackery, are often used to describe methods of diagnosing, preventing, or treating health conditions and diseases, including cancer. As a patient, it is important to understand what the terms mean, which approaches are considered safe, and where you can find accurate information about various types of treatments.

### Medical/Clinical Treatments

Medical or clinical treatments are those that have been clinically tested for years, following a strict set of guidelines, and are found to be safe and effective. The results of such studies have been published in medical journals and peer-reviewed by other doctors and/or scientists in the field. The Food and Drug Administration grants approval for the treatments or procedures to be used in mainstream medicine.

### Investigational Treatments

Investigational treatments or research treatments or therapies are studied in a clinical trial. Clinical trials are research based projects that determine whether a new treatment is effective and safe and, if applicable, the optimal dose for treatment. Before a drug, device or other treatment can be widely and responsibly used to treat patients, it is studied and tested, first in a laboratory setting, usually with test tubes, and then in animals. If these studies prove successful and safe, the treatment is then tested on patients in a clinical trial. Patients are recruited to participate in a clinical trial and are monitored as to their response to the investigational therapy. A significant number of patients must participate in order to validate the results. If clinical trials prove the effectiveness of the treatment or drug, the Food and Drug Administration may approve it for regular use by healthcare providers. Only then does the treatment become part of the standard, recommended collection of proven methods used to treat or diagnose disease in human beings.

### Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies refer to supportive methods that are used to complement or add to proven medical treatments. Complementary therapies may not be used to cure disease but rather to help control symptoms and improve general well-being. Examples of some types of complementary therapies that may support medical treatment are:

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Aromatherapy
- Art and music therapy
- Biofeedback
- Massage therapy
- Prayer
- Spiritual practices
- Journaling
- T'ai chi
- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Counseling and psychotherapy
- Healing energy
- Herbal therapy
- Chiropractic therapy
- Reflexology
- Hypnotherapy

## **Integrative Therapy**

Integrative therapy is a term that refers to the combination of both evidence-based or mainstream medicine and complementary therapies.

## **Unproven or Untested Methods**

Unproven or untested therapies may refer to treatments with little basis in scientific fact. They may also refer to treatments or tests that are currently under investigation. Adequate scientific study and evidence is not yet available to support its use.

## **Alternative Therapies**

Alternative refers to treatments that are used in place of conventional medical therapies and may often be promoted as cures. Most often they are unproven because they have never been scientifically tested according to U.S. standards or they may have been tested and found to be ineffective. Choosing alternative therapies instead of traditional medical treatments may cause a patient to put her health at risk.

## **Quackery**

Quackery refers to the treatments, drugs or devices that claim to prevent, diagnose or cure diseases or health conditions, including cancer, but are known to be false or have no proven scientific evidence on which to base their claims. These methods are most often based on a few patient testimonials or so called "doctor" recommendations as evidence for its efficacy and safety. Often the treatment is claimed to be effective for multiple diseases as well as cancer. The elderly or chronically ill are often targets of quackery therapies.

## **Find the Right Treatment**

After a cancer diagnosis, you deserve every opportunity to restore your health to optimal levels. Choosing appropriate treatments is the foundation for your recovery. Many people find that it is helpful to combine complementary therapies with treatment recommended by their healthcare providers but are often reluctant to share this decision with their physician. However, it is important to tell your healthcare providers about any treatments, therapies, drugs, vitamins or herbal products you are considering. There are many therapies you can safely use along with standard medical treatment to relieve symptoms, reduce side effects, ease pain and to enjoy your life more. However, there are some therapies that could interfere with traditional treatment and even cause harmful side effects. Recovery is a partnership between you and your physician. You must communicate to receive the best care possible.

## **Finding Information on Complementary and Alternative Treatments**

The Internet is a helpful tool for self-education. However, it is also a tool that can be used to promote useless treatments with unproven outcomes. The following is a list of reputable sites providing information you may find helpful.

### **Alternative and Complementary Medicine:**

- American Cancer Society  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- CancerGuide by Steve Dunn  
[www.cancerguide.org](http://www.cancerguide.org)
- National Cancer Institute  
[www.nci.nih.gov](http://www.nci.nih.gov)
- National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)  
[www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)
- NIH Center for Complementary & Alternative Medicine Citation Index  
[www.nccam.nih.gov/health/decisions](http://www.nccam.nih.gov/health/decisions)

### **Herbal and Food Supplements:**

- American Botanical Council  
www.herbalgram.org
- Medical Herbalism: A Journal for the Clinical Practitioner  
www.medherb.com
- US Pharmacopoeia Consumer  
www.usp.org

### **Research on Alternative/Unproved Methods:**

- National Council Against Health Fraud  
www.ncahf.org
- Quackwatch  
www.quackwatch.com

### **Book on Complementary and Alternative Therapies:**

- American Cancer Society's Guide to Complementary and Alternative Cancer Methods,  
Foreword by David S. Rosenthal, M.D.

### ***Additional Information:***

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