Complementary therapies
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing a complementary therapy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a complementary therapist</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do therapies cost?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of therapy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiatsu and acupressure</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aromatherapy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massage</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing and energy therapies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga, Tai Chi and Chi Gung</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbal medicine</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeopathy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypnotherapy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexology</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A final word on complementary therapies</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping you face breast cancer</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further support</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer organisations</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary therapy organisations</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness resources</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This booklet is for anyone interested in finding out more about complementary therapies and breast cancer. It has information about some complementary therapies and what you may need to think about before trying one.

Complementary therapies are used alongside conventional breast cancer treatments; they are different from alternative therapies which are used instead of conventional treatments.

If you want to have a complementary therapy, speak to your specialist team first. There’s very little reliable research into complementary therapies. So it’s hard to judge how useful complementary therapies are and whether they could affect your breast cancer treatment. Doctors may advise you to avoid certain complementary therapies (particularly herbal medicines) if there’s a chance they may affect how well your breast cancer treatment works.

‘After the diagnosis, which came as a shock to me, I had the feeling my life revolved around the breast cancer: running from hospital appointment to treatment to blood tests and back again. I had to make so many decisions about my treatment, especially right after my diagnosis. Complementary therapies were a great way to relax for a moment and calm down.’

Hedwig
Choosing a complementary therapy

There’s a wide range of complementary therapies. You may want to look at the types of therapies that are available locally, how they work and what you feel may be helpful for you.

You may also want to think about how comfortable you are with the way a therapy is given. For example, some therapies will require several appointments, and some may mean you will need to be undressed. However, a good complementary therapist will do their best to put you at ease.

‘I would definitely recommend complementary therapies. I suffered fatigue and nausea and I tried complementary therapies after my second diagnosis and I really enjoyed them. I enjoy having some “me” time and not having to think about hospital appointments.’

Mary

‘Different therapies have different benefits. I’ve used them to help with stress, spiritual issues, and all sorts of problems in mind and body.’

Judy
Finding a complementary therapist

Some complementary therapists work in hospitals. Your breast care nurse may be able to tell you more about this or give you a list of therapists in your area.

You can also ask your GP or a local cancer support group for information on therapists. Some hospices, cancer support centres and charities also provide complementary therapies.

You may want to ask the therapist if they’ve worked with people diagnosed with breast cancer. Whoever you choose, it’s important you trust them and feel comfortable with the therapy plan they recommend.

‘My breast care nurse told me about complementary therapies. I also attended an information day at my hospital which mentioned complementary therapies.’

Hedwig

‘I cannot stress how these treatments helped, clearing my head, giving me space to relax and so on. The therapists were really good at putting me at ease. Their manner and confidence in dealing with cancer patients were more than reassuring.’

Eithne
How much do therapies cost?

Complementary therapies offered by hospitals, cancer support centres, hospices and charities may be free or their cost may be based on what you can afford to pay.

If there are no free or low-cost therapies available locally, you may think about paying privately. The cost will vary with each therapist and the type of therapy you choose.

‘I was very lucky to get my first six treatments free at the centre, and they then offered reduced rates for cancer patients.’

Mary

‘A Breast Cancer Care volunteer at a Younger Women Together event told me that Breast Cancer Haven offer complementary therapies and I have had nine free massage sessions through them.’

Katie

‘On the advice of a friend, I visited a Helen Rollason Cancer Support Centre about once a week during my chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I received massage, aromatherapy, reflexology and flower remedies for free.’

Eithne
Types of therapy

Many complementary therapies refer to chi, qi or ki. Although the spelling of this may vary, the idea of chi, qi or ki as an energy force remains the same. In this booklet we use chi.

Acupuncture

An acupuncturist will insert very fine needles into the skin at various points on the body. The acupuncture needles stimulate nerves under the skin and in muscle tissue, causing the body to produce natural chemicals, such as endorphins. Endorphins are hormones that give you a feeling of wellbeing.

Acupuncture needles shouldn’t be placed in your arm or surrounding area if you’ve had surgery to the lymph nodes (glands) under the arm.

Some people believe acupuncture helps with some side effects of chemotherapy, such as nausea and sickness, when given alongside conventional anti-sickness drugs. Others believe acupuncture may also be helpful in the treatment of pain.

‘I would recommend all of the therapies I tried (reflexology, acupuncture, massage, herbal remedies). Acupuncture was particularly helpful for my back pain.’

Jacqui

‘Acupuncture considerably reduced the severity and frequency of my hot flushes and helped my night sweats.’

June
**Shiatsu and acupressure**

The word shiatsu means finger pressure. Shiatsu is often referred to as acupressure because it’s thought to work in a similar way to acupuncture.

A shiatsu therapist believes that health problems happen due to an imbalance or blockage in the flow of energy, or chi, in the body. They believe they can release these blockages by applying gentle pressure to the body, often using their thumbs and palms, and sometimes their elbows, knees, and feet.

**Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy uses essential oils, taken from fragrant plants, flowers, seeds, and bark, to stimulate the sense of smell which is believed by aromatherapists to help healing. Aromatherapists choose an oil or mixture of oils according to your physical and emotional needs.

Essential oils can be used in several ways. They can be mixed with a base oil to be used in massage, added to a bath, inhaled, evaporated using an oil burner or blended with a lotion to be applied to the skin.

‘My breast care nurse told me about complementary therapies and I had aromatherapy massages while having chemotherapy. It was relaxing and took my mind off the chemotherapy. The therapists were able to reach most parts of my body even with me sitting down attached to a drip.’

*Katie*

‘I tried aromatherapy massages and reflexology. The benefits from complementary therapies were amazing. They calmed me down and increased my sense of wellbeing during a difficult time after surgery.’

*Patricia*
Massage

Massage involves working on the body’s muscles and joints using the hands to stretch and apply pressure. This action can soothe stiffness and is thought to help the flow of lymph fluid and blood. The rhythmic strokes used in massage can also help you feel relaxed.

Some people believe you shouldn’t have a massage if you’ve had cancer because there’s a risk of moving cancer cells from one part of the body to another. There’s no evidence to support this idea.

If you’ve had surgery to the lymph nodes (glands) under your arm, you’ll usually be advised not to have deep tissue massage to that arm unless your therapist has also been trained in a type of massage known as manual lymphatic drainage. It’s important to tell your specialist team if you’re thinking of having a massage. You should also tell your massage therapist about your breast cancer and its treatment.

If you’re having radiotherapy, the area being treated should not be massaged.

‘When I had chemotherapy, my hands and feet were really sore and a massage was blissful relief.’

Eithne

‘I find massage makes me happier and helps me cope with fatigue and joint pain.’

Verite
‘I was very stressed out thinking about whether the cancer would come back and massage has relieved this stress. It also helped the cording on my arm that occurred from having lymph nodes removed. I asked my specialist team if it was OK to massage the arm and shoulder on the side I had surgery and lymph nodes removed. They suggested a gentle massage, rather than a deep tissue massage.’

Katie

Healing and energy therapies

Healing is an ancient practice which means to ‘make whole’. There are several healing therapies which include Reiki, therapeutic touch and spiritual healing. Therapists aim to improve your health and wellbeing, although beliefs about how this is done vary depending on the therapy used.

Reiki is one of the most well-known healing therapies. Therapists believe that an energy, known as chi, flows from the therapist to the person being treated to help restore balance and wellbeing. You can either sit or lie down, fully clothed, while the therapist places their hands above, or on, certain parts of the body where they believe energy is strong. You may start to feel very relaxed during the treatment and this may last for some time after the session has finished. Some centres have group Reiki sessions where several people are treated at once.

‘After my treatment I had Reiki to prepare myself for my return to work. I felt nurtured, re-energised and ready to face the world again. I now try and incorporate it into my everyday life. I have been trained in Reiki so I am able to treat myself.’

Susan
Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about focusing on the present moment to try to reduce stress and improve quality of life. Some people believe by being mindful we become more aware of the sights, smells, sounds and tastes that are around us at any one time, as well as the thoughts and feelings that happen from one moment to the next.

There are a few NHS cancer centres in the UK that offer mindfulness classes. These classes might use Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which combines cognitive behavioural therapy with mindfulness. Classes also use meditation, yoga and breathing techniques.

It’s also possible to practise mindfulness for yourself in daily life. To get ideas about how to do this there are lots of books and websites dedicated to mindfulness as well as apps that you can download. See the ‘Further support’ section on page 22.

Yoga, Tai Chi and Chi Gung

There are different types of yoga which use exercise, breathing and sometimes meditation. Some styles, such as iyengar and restorative yoga, focus on relaxation and are suitable for beginners. Depending on the type of yoga you do, it may be vigorous or gentle leaving you feeling full of energy or relaxed. Yoga can be practised in classes, one to one with a yoga teacher or at home. You may want to tell your yoga teacher about your breast cancer and its treatment.

Tai Chi is an old form of Chinese exercise. It involves slow and controlled movements, which may help to stretch and strengthen the body’s muscles and joints. Some people believe that the concentration involved in Tai Chi, as with yoga, can be very calming.

Chi Gung (also spelled Qi Gong) uses breathing exercises and gentle movements which some people believe help the flow of energy, called chi, around the body. Others believe that Chi Gung can also help to lower stress levels.

Yoga, Tai Chi and Chi Gung involve stretching the arms and shoulders so anyone who’s had surgery to the lymph nodes (glands) in the armpit should discuss this with their teacher before a class and avoid overstretching the area. If it’s painful, particularly to the arm or shoulder on the side of your surgery, stop doing it straight away.
‘After my treatment was finished I went back to doing yoga. My weekly class helps me relax as well as exercise.’

Eithne

‘I plan to start yoga soon as I want to get back into exercise and think it will help me relax and build up the muscle I have lost from not going to the gym in over six months.’

Katie

Herbal medicine

Herbal medicine uses plants to try to help with a range of health conditions. A few of the more commonly used herbal medicines are mentioned below. As with all herbal medicines, check with your specialist team or GP before using them.

Herbs are thought to have a reviving, balancing and strengthening effect, which some people believe helps the body to fight illness more easily.

In conventional medicine a number of drugs use active plant ingredients blended together. In herbal medicine the whole plant is often used including leaves, roots and berries. However, just because herbal medicines use natural plant ingredients it doesn’t mean they are always safe and some herbal medicines have been withdrawn because of the health problems they’ve caused.

Phytoestrogens

A balanced diet will naturally contain some phytoestrogens, also known as plant oestrogens. Phytoestrogens are most commonly found in foods and soya products such as pulses, cereals, green vegetables and soya milk, and in supplements such as red clover and black cohosh.
Phytoestrogens may act as a weak form of the human hormone oestrogen. Because the evidence about the safety of using phytoestrogens after breast cancer is not clear, it’s important to talk to your specialist team or dietitian before changing your diet to eat more phytoestrogen-rich foods or taking supplements.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is an independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance in England on promoting good health and treating ill health. NICE does not recommend soy (isoflavones) or red clover supplements for the treatment of menopausal symptoms in women with breast cancer because the evidence on their effectiveness and safety is limited and conflicting.

Mistletoe (Iscador)
Some people believe that mistletoe extract helps the immune system work better, improves quality of life and reduces the side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. However, there’s no reliable evidence to support this theory.

Echinacea
Echinacea is a herbal product believed by some to help boost the immune system. However, there’s no reliable evidence to support this idea. People taking steroids or having chemotherapy treatment shouldn’t take echinacea as it can affect how well these treatments work, and can result in severe illness.

St John’s Wort and ginseng
These are used for a variety of health issues, but there’s some evidence that they may affect the way the breast cancer drug tamoxifen works, reducing its effectiveness.

Ginkgo biloba, ginger and garlic
These herbal supplements may alter how well blood clots so don’t take them before surgery. However, it’s fine to have garlic and ginger in food.
Wild yam, ginseng and fennel

Wild yam, ginseng and fennel contain a mixture of many hormone-like substances, but their benefits or harms are not clear.

Discuss any herbal supplements with your specialist or breast care nurse before taking them, particularly if you’re taking tamoxifen, heparin or warfarin or having chemotherapy.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is the use of very low doses of natural substances which, when matched to the individual, aim to stimulate a self-healing or self-repair response in the body. However, there’s no reliable evidence to support this idea.

Homeopathic remedies are made in different strengths but homeopaths believe the remedies with the strongest effect are often the more diluted (watered down) ones.

‘A homeopath gave me tablets during chemotherapy. I don’t know whether the pills “worked” in the traditional sense, but the ritual of taking them reassured me.’

Judy

Hypnotherapy

Hypnosis can help some people reach a deep state of relaxation.

During hypnosis you’ll remain conscious and aware of your surroundings. It’s believed by some to make your mind more open to accept new ways of thinking, acting and feeling.

Hypnotherapists use hypnosis to try to help people cope with a range of feelings as well as phobias, hot flushes, nausea and pain.
Reflexology

Reflexology is thought to stimulate the nerves in the feet, and sometimes the hands. Reflexologists believe that different areas of the feet link to different areas of the body, and that by treating these areas of the feet with finger pressure, the linked parts of the body can be healed.

‘I firmly believe reflexology helped me through chemotherapy. My side effects were minimal and my energy levels remained high. It was also non-intrusive at a time when I had discomfort following surgery.’

Susan

‘Reflexology was great for my general wellbeing. I had a range of digestive problems with chemotherapy, from nausea to diarrhoea. The reflexology helped me feel more confident in dealing with these discomforts.’

Eithne
A final word on complementary therapies

Finding the right complementary therapy for you will depend on your personal choice.

If you’re having treatment for breast cancer, let your specialist team know about any complementary therapies you’re thinking about trying, including food supplements. If you see a complementary therapist, you should tell them about your breast cancer and its treatment.

‘I asked my oncologist and she told me to “go for it”. The therapist at the centre asked me to fill in a health questionnaire and then we both decided which would be the most suitable therapy for me.’

Mary

Complementary therapies can give you comfort and help you feel relaxed when coming to terms with the physical and emotional effects of breast cancer and its treatment. With the right therapy and therapist you may find, as many people do, that complementary therapies can offer much needed extra support – before, during and after your treatment for breast cancer.
‘Complementary therapies soothed my soul and lifted my spirits. My energy returned and my natural optimism began to surface. I was able to start to make sense of my diagnosis and make decisions regarding my medical treatment. My husband has also had several therapy sessions and benefited enormously.’

Susan

‘I find complementary therapies empowering. They remind me what I can do for myself, at a time when I’m feeling out of control. I always feel lighter and happier after a session, and emotions don’t overwhelm me as much as they used to. I can’t imagine where I’d be without them.’

Judy
Helping you face breast cancer

Treatments for breast cancer can be complex and if you’re wondering where to turn for support in making treatment decisions or coping with side effects, we can help with practical and emotional support.

Ask us
Our free Helpline is answered by specialist nurses and trained staff with personal experience of breast cancer. They understand your issues and can answer questions. Or you can Ask the Nurse by email on our website.

Free Helpline 0808 800 6000 (Text Relay 18001)
Monday–Friday 9am–5pm, Saturday 10am–2pm
www.breastcancercare.org.uk/ATN

Talk to someone who understands
Our Someone Like Me service puts you in contact by phone or email with someone else who’s had breast cancer and who’s been trained to help.

Online, you can chat to other people going through breast cancer on our professionally moderated discussion Forum or join a free, weekly Live Chat session.

In your area
We provide a variety of services in person across the UK, including:

HeadStrong prepares you for the possibility of losing your hair because of cancer treatment. In a private meeting, trained volunteers talk with you about how to look after your scalp before, during and after treatment. They’ll also share ideas on how to make the most of scarves, hats and other headwear.

Moving Forward Information Sessions and longer courses on adjusting to life after treatment. Both have expert speakers and offer the chance to talk to other people in the same situation as you.

Find out about all our services for people affected by breast cancer at www.breastcancercare.org.uk/services or phone the Helpline. We can help you decide which of our services are right for you.
Further support

Cancer organisations

Cancerkin
The Cancerkin Centre, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street,
London NW3 2QG
Telephone: 020 7830 2323/2310
Email: info@cancerkin.org.uk
Website: www.cancerkin.org.uk

Offers emotional and practical support to people with breast cancer and their friends and families. Provides a range of complementary therapies free of charge. The Cancerkin Centre is located at the Royal Free Hospital in north London, but they also provide services in east London from a number of locations.

The Haven
Effie Road, London SW6 1TB
Telephone: 020 7384 0099
Email: info@thehaven.org.uk
Website: www.thehaven.org.uk

Provides support, information and complementary therapies to help anyone affected by breast cancer to cope with the emotional impact of diagnosis, as well as to help relieve the uncomfortable side effects of some medical treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Its services are free of charge to anyone affected by breast cancer.
Helen Rollason Cancer Support Centres
Yvonne Stewart House, The Street, Hatfield Peverel, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 2EH
Telephone: 08456 80 20 47
Email: enquiries@helenrollason.org.uk
Website: www.helenrollason.org.uk

Supports people living with cancer and their families and friends. Provides free therapies including massage and reflexology. There are three centres located in Essex, Hertfordshire and London.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care
(formerly Bristol Cancer Help Centre)
Chapel Pill Lane, Pill, Bristol BS20 0HH
Helpline: 0845 123 23 10
Email: helpline@pennybrohn.org
Website: www.pennybrohncancercare.org

Offers residential and non-residential courses (led by doctors and therapists) for people with cancer and their supporters offering counselling, relaxation, meditation, art and music therapy, healing and advice on nutrition. Helpline offers emotional support, and information on finding complementary therapists and support in your area.
Complementary therapy organisations

British Acupuncture Council (BAcC)
63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9HQ
Telephone: 020 8735 0400
Website: www.acupuncture.org.uk

Provides information on acupuncture and a list of professional practitioners.

British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA)
PO Box 5122, Bournemouth BH8 0WG
Telephone: 0845 345 5977
Email: office@bcma.co.uk
Website: www.bcma.co.uk

Produces a guide and a code of conduct for practitioners, and holds a register of practitioners.

British Herbal Medicine Association
PO Box 583, Exeter EX1 9GX
Telephone: 0845 680 1134
Email: secretary@bhma.info
Website: www.bhma.info

Provides an information service and publications on herbal medicine.

British Homeopathic Association
Hahmann House, 29 Park Street West
Luton LU1 3BE
Telephone: 01582 408675
Email: info@britishhomeopathic.org
Website: www.britishhomeopathic.org

Provides information and a directory of homeopaths. Produces a booklet called ‘How to get homeopathic treatment on the NHS’ and a quarterly magazine.
British Reflexology Association
Monks Orchard, Whitbourne, Worcester WR6 5RB
Telephone: 01886 821 207
Email: bra@britreflex.co.uk
Website: www.britreflex.co.uk

Represents reflexology practitioners and provides information on reflexology.

British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis
Inspiration House, Redbrook Grove
Sheffield S20 6RR
Telephone: 0844 884 3116
Website: www.bscah.com

Provides a referral list. All practitioners are from medical, psychological, dental or nursing backgrounds.

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council
Albert Buildings
49 Queen Victoria Street
London EC4N 4SA
Telephone: 020 7653 1971
Email: info@cnhc.org.uk
Website: www.cnhc.org.uk

In the UK, complementary therapists are not regulated by law, however the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council is a voluntary regulator for complementary healthcare practitioners. You can search the register for local practitioners.
International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists (IFPA)
82 Ashby Road, Hinckley
Leicestershire LE10 1SN
Telephone: 01455 637987
Email: admin@ifparoma.org
Website: www.ifparoma.org

Provides information and a register of professional aromatherapists.

The Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine
Office 5, 1 Exeter Street, Norwich NR2 4QB
Telephone: 01603 623994
Email: herbmed@rchm.co.uk
Website: www.rchm.co.uk

Provides information, news and a list of member practitioners.

Mindfulness resources

Below are some websites and apps that can help you practise mindfulness.

About Meditation
Has some free mini courses and infographics, as well as an online audio course, which you have to pay for.

aboutmeditation.com

Be Mindful
Be mindful offers free online courses in mindfulness

bemindful.co.uk
Conscious
Conscious is an app available for Android and iOS devices. It increases your mindfulness through simple daily challenges.

Headspace
Headspace is a useful tool to help you incorporate meditation in your daily life, with online sessions and an app.

www.headspace.com

Mindfulness Bell
This is an app available for Android and iOS devices. You can set the bell to ring at specified intervals, or at random, throughout the day.

The Oxford Mindfulness Centre
An international centre within Oxford University’s Department of Psychiatry that offers courses in mindfulness

oxfordmindfulness.org

Smiling Mind
Smiling Mind is a web and app-based project providing free tools for mindfulness meditation. It is a not-for-profit Australian initiative for young people and adults.

smilingmind.com.au
We’re here for you: help us to be there for other people too

If you found this booklet helpful, please use this form to send us a donation. Our information resources and other services are only free because of support from people such as you.

We want to be there for every person facing the emotional and physical trauma of a breast cancer diagnosis. Donate today and together we can ensure that everyone affected by breast cancer has someone to turn to.

Donate by post
Please accept my donation of £10/£20/my own choice of £

I enclose a cheque/PO/CAF voucher made payable to Breast Cancer Care

Donate online
You can give using a debit or credit card at www.breastcancercare.org.uk/donate

My details
Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
__________________________________
__________________________________
__________________________________ Postcode __________

Email address ____________________________

We might occasionally want to send you more information about our services and activities

☐ Please tick if you’re happy to receive email from us
☐ Please tick if you don’t want to receive post from us

We won’t pass on your details to any other organisation or third parties.

Please return this form to Breast Cancer Care, Freepost RRKZ-ARZY-YCKG, 5–13 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0NS
About this booklet

Complementary therapies was written by Breast Cancer Care’s clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.

For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

Phone 0345 092 0808
Email publications@breastcancercare.org.uk

You can order or download more copies from www.breastcancercare.org.uk/publications

For a large print, Braille, DAISY format or audio CD version:

Phone 0345 092 0808
Email publications@breastcancercare.org.uk
Breast Cancer Care is the only UK-wide charity providing specialist support and tailored information for anyone affected by breast cancer.

Our clinical expertise and emotional support network help thousands of people find a way to live with, through and beyond breast cancer.

Visit [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk) or call us free on 0808 800 6000 (Text Relay 18001).

Central Office
Breast Cancer Care
5–13 Great Suffolk Street
London SE1 0NS
Phone: 0345 092 0800
Email: info@breastcancercare.org.uk