



MIND-BODY MEDICINE AND INTEGRATIVE CANCER CARE

This Guide had been provided by the Anticancer Fund as a service to patients, to help patients and their relatives better understand the nature of mind-body medicine and of integrative cancer care. We recommend patients to consult their doctor. The information described in this document is based on scientific research and has informative purposes only.

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DEFINITION OF MIND-BODY MEDICINE

This term is used for all kinds of treatments that are focused on the interactions between the mind (awareness, consciousness, and ability to think) and the body. These are techniques aiming at enhancing the mind's capacity to influence the body's functions and symptoms. Two additional terms need to be explained in this context: psycho-neuro-immunology and psycho-neuro-endocrinology.

Psycho-neuro-immunology (PNI) encompasses the knowledge about the mind, the brain, and the immune system. Psycho-neuro-endocrinology deals with the mind, the brain, and the hormonal system. Thus, there are complex interactions between all these systems.

The communication processes between the body and the mind cannot be understood as merely showing cause and effect. So many factors influence our inner balance. Within us, there is a huge communications network, yet research on this topic is still in its infancy. This research is focused on appropriate ways to make the invisible (our mind) visible. Possible imaging methods are brain imaging, mapping hormonal changes, and the analysis of certain blood cells.

It is important to realize that you have the chance to be actively engaged in your healing process because of these highly complicated interwoven systems. Your quality of life can be improved by choosing specific treatment modalities that can influence these regulative systems, such as mindfulness-based clinical interventions, relaxation techniques, guided imagery, and meditation.

Being diagnosed with cancer causes stress and everybody deals with it differently. Learning how to cope with long-lasting stress is very important, especially for you as a patient and for your family caregivers. Your treatment may also cause a lot of stress. Finding a way to be calmer enhances your quality of life.

There is a broad scope of treatment modalities that claim to stimulate the immune system through different mind-body approaches. It might not be easy to distinguish which one will work well for you. The most important question is: do you feel comfortable while using this modality? You are the only one who can answer this question. Ask other patients about their experiences with a certain therapy, as they can give you some hints on important questions to ask the practitioner.

Mind-body approaches, in a broad sense, also encompass the work of healers. These healers may come from a traditional background (e.g. African, Indian, Native American) or they may work as individuals without belonging to a spiritual tradition. Healing is very dependent on the skills and the integrity of the healer and on the receptiveness of the patient. Research on the effectiveness of healing, however, is still very scarce.



DEFINITION OF INTEGRATIVE CANCER CARE

Integrative (from the Latin *integer*, meaning whole or entire) means combining therapies so that they work together or form a whole. Integrative Cancer Care aims to combine the practices of conventional medicine and those of complementary treatment modalities into a unified treatment approach. In order to reach this goal, the care providers need to have knowledge of the different treatment options so that the combination can be of greatest use to their patient. “Together we can” means that medical oncologists and providers of complementary treatment modalities should really work with each other, with *you* (the patient) being central to all considerations and decisions.

Integrative Cancer Care means caring for the whole person. Thus, all dimensions of the individual are encompassed: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. A multidisciplinary approach is employed by a team of professionals including medical doctors, nurses, psychologists, physical therapists, providers of spiritual care, social workers, dieticians, providers of many different complementary treatment modalities (such as e.g. mindfulness-based stress reduction, breathing exercises, movement therapies, special forms of gentle massage, art therapies, music therapy). Lifestyle coaching belongs to the core concepts of Integrative Cancer Care. This includes advice on healthy nutrition and physical exercise, and lessons on relaxation techniques. Some Integrative Cancer Care centers are linked to a certain medical and/or philosophical background, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, naturopathy or Anthroposophic Medicine.

Under the wide “umbrella” of Integrative Cancer Care, a very broad range of different approaches exists. What integrative oncology looks like, also depends on the country and the region where you live. You may find Integrative Cancer Care centers in academic hospitals, sometimes actually integrated into the oncology ward, and sometimes in a separate building. In some countries, integrative cancer care is provided in small, private hospitals. You may come across centers that tend to use more conventional medicine, combining this with a few complementary treatments. Some centers were at one time well-known only for their complementary treatments in, but now offer mainstream treatments in combination with these complementary modalities as Integrative Cancer Care. In North America, many comprehensive cancer centers have Integrative Cancer Care departments, and some private hospitals/foundations also offer Integrative Cancer Care. In Europe, there are important differences between countries. In Germany and Switzerland, Integrative Cancer Care departments exist in many private and academic hospitals, whereas in other countries such as France, Belgium or the UK, Integrative Cancer Care departments are rather rare. This does not mean that there is no place for complementary options in academic and private hospitals in the latter countries. Many hospitals in these countries propose a various range of complementary therapies, but wording and visibility regarding Integrative Cancer Care are different from Germany and Switzerland.

There are currently no national or European certifications for Integrative Cancer Care centers as such. The term “Integrative Cancer Care” can be used by hospitals without having to comply with certain standards. However, some centers might provide integrative cancer care without using the name ‘integrative’. Therefore, and also concerning any decision regarding your treatment, it is very important that you always ask for information on the quality of the care provided. During your first appointment in an Integrative Cancer Care Center, ask the care providers about the treatments they offer, both in relation to the conventional as to the complementary modalities. What do they use:

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type of treatment, setting, and frequency? Who is giving this treatment? Ask for the professional training and additional qualifications of the care provider. Why is a specific treatment proposed in your case? What are the origins and background of this treatment? Which clinical experiences in oncology can be shown? Is there scientific research, or are there ongoing clinical trials? This information will help you to make informed decisions. Moreover, you can also ask for a second opinion.

Integration does not automatically mean that all treatments provided in an Integrative Cancer Care center are included in the official (and reimbursed) services of the hospital. Complementary treatments are often not reimbursed by health insurance providers, even when they are used in integrative centers. Integrative Cancer Care centers sometimes provide (partial) reimbursement by charity foundations linked to the center. There are major differences between countries in this regard.

Communication on the use of complementary and alternative treatment modalities is often easier in Integrative Cancer Care centers than in mainstream clinical settings. The oncologists in integrative centers ask their patients openly about the use of complementary treatments. Thus, patients are inclined to report more details of their use (inside and outside the Integrative Cancer Care center) to their oncologist. This information is very important because the oncologist can inform you about interactions between complementary and conventional treatments (such as the interaction between St. John's wort and certain types of chemotherapy).