

Whole Body Health

May 2008 E-Newsletter



May is National Fitness and Family Wellness Month, which is the perfect time for us to focus the E-Newsletter on your whole body and ways to achieve health and healing. [Our Regional One-day Seminar](#) attendees keep asking for more information about Integrative and Complementary Medicine, so we hope you will benefit from the resources we put together for you this month. But where to start?

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) covers the broad spectrum of health care services, practices, and products--like massage therapy, herbs, supplements, Reiki and other homeopathic practices--not currently utilized within conventional (or Western) medicine. When used in addition to conventional medicine, the term "integrative medicine" is typically used. As our culture has become more aware of ways to work towards total body wellbeing, most of us have begun to integrate particular practices from CAM into our daily health routine. Do you take a multi-vitamin, or extra vitamin C when you feel like a cold is coming on? You are using CAM. But do those with cancer need to be aware of when seeking CAM therapies in conjunction with their conventional treatments, especially chemotherapy and radiation? We hope this newsletter will point you in the right direction.



Cancer can leave you feeling like your body has been uprooted from its healthy base. Finding ways to nurture your body--even while it seems so fragile--is important. For this reason we also put together a Quick List of CAM ideas that might work for you. Make sure to check out our Survivor Story with Alisa Whitmore. She is a stage IV survivor who is using CAM, along with diet and exercise to help her in her fight with this disease. Lastly, we have included an article about Genetics and Colorectal Cancer.

To health and healing!

Your friends at the Colon Cancer Alliance

This month's issue contains information and links for informational purposes only. CCA does not endorse any particular practitioners, modalities, or treatment course. We do, however, fully endorse all survivors working towards wholeness and health, and recognize each survivor is on their own path.

Please speak with your doctor before engaging in any CAM modality in order to ensure its safety for you and your treatment goals.

Integrative Medicine: Is it for you?

Most likely, you have already utilized some form of Complementary or Alternative Medicine (CAM). One survey shows that almost 50 percent of adults in the US over the age of 18 utilize CAM (not including prayer) in their lifetime.(1) The numbers are even higher for older Americans. An AARP study demonstrates two-thirds of American's over 50 use CAM.(2) Why is this? Complementary Medicine makes sense to many of us because it looks at our whole person-body, mind and spirit-and not just at the unique physical symptoms that indicate illness.



It is normal and natural to want to have as many options as possible in your arsenal when fighting cancer. Some patients choose to work outside of standard care or to seek alternative treatments only. CCA supports an integrative approach instead. You can utilize CAM products and practices while seeking the conventional healing routes of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. The key is to use your oncologist as a partner in your quest to integrate these practices and products into their plan to attack the cancer. Deborah Kanter, a stage III rectal cancer survivor and Holistic Health Counselor, decided to calm her mind and body with CAM practices so she could go through her radiation and chemotherapy treatments feeling better. She chose not to see chemotherapy as "poison" but instead as "healing" because for her the chemo was just part of the whole of the modalities she utilized to fight her cancer. For her, the integrative approach made sense.

Not every approach will work for everyone. No magic pill or panacea exists, but different approaches might provide benefits to different individuals. In other words, every "body" is different. So how do you get started when you want to add CAM to your standard of care? The good news is that most comprehensive cancer centers now have on-site integrative medicine teams or departments, as do many larger hospitals and university affiliated systems. In addition, you can research through the Internet, books, magazines, friends and family different modalities you might want to consider. In fact, [The American Holistic Medical Association](#) publishes a book, [The American Holistic Medical Association Guide to Holistic Health: Healing Therapies for Optimal Wellness](#), which is available through your favorite bookseller. Also make sure to visit the [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine's website](#).

The most important caveat: You must speak with your doctor before beginning any CAM treatment. Why? Because you do not want to participate in anything that will harm you in your quest for healing and wholeness. Sometimes it is not easy to speak with your physician about the things you are doing or are interested in pursuing. You might feel these options are "out there" or will be dismissed by your doctor. In fact, the same study that showed two-thirds of the 50 plus crowd who use CAM also showed only one-third actually talk to their doctor about it.(2) Need help broaching the subject? The National Institute of Health's National Center for CAM has a [handy guide with tips on how to talk to your doctor](#).

In fact, NCCAM also has great resources available. [Check out their guide to selecting a practitioner](#). From her experiences, Deborah Kanter also offers us some advice on how to choose a practitioner:

1. Interview anyone you are thinking about using FIRST.
2. Ask them to describe their own approach to healing their bodies.
3. Ask them to describe what "wellness" is to them.
4. Ask about their education. (For example, attending a weekend retreat class is very different from years of study with a particular school.)
5. Ask them how much research they do or have done about the particular practices and products they suggest. A great deal of research is currently being done on the impact of CAM on our

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New Online Community

A big "thank you" to everyone who has joined our new Online Community: My CRC Connections! The site has fast become a meeting place, support network, and idea exchange for all who participate. How beautiful to see so many new friendships beginning and old ones reconnecting or flourishing!

Have not joined yet? It is easy. [Just click here to be taken to the sign-up page.](#)

CAM Quick Links

[NCI: Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#)

[Cancer Information Service](#)

[MSKCCC Searchable Database About Herbs, Botanicals and Other Products](#)

[National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#)

Blue Star Tributes

Have you created a Blue Star Tribute Page yet? [CCA's Tributes Program](#) lets you create a web page to honor a survivor, or

wellness and healing. Make sure they are a part of it in some manner. (Also, did you know that many hospitals offer clinical trials related to CAM? [Check out this database to see if there is one near you.](#))

You may have noticed that we keep using the words "wholeness" and "healing" and not the word "cure." The thing about cancer, and colorectal cancer in particular, is that some people are cured and some people are treated for as long as possible. The good news is that wholeness and healing are always available even if cure is not. How so? When we nurture our whole being--body, mind and spirit--healing takes place and wholeness is possible. This is a different concept from traditional healing, in which the body is restored to being exactly the same as it was prior to the illness or injury. This type of healing is about maximizing life in the present, even if that present still has cancer written on the page. And that is something available to anyone regardless of stage or treatment course. CAM practices often focus on this kind of healing, which can only help you feel more empowered as you seek to treat your disease and live your life fully!

References

- (1) Barnes PM, Powell-Griner E, McFann K, Nahin RL. Complementary and alternative medicine use among adults: United States, 2002. CDC Advance Data Report #343. 2004.
- (2) AARP, NCCAM. Complementary and Alternative Medicine: What People 50 and Older Are Using and Discussing with Their Physicians. Consumer Survey Report; January 18, 2007.

Special thanks to Deborah Kanter for offering the gift of time and her expertise to this article.



Survivor Story: Alisa Whitford

Alisa Whitford is a thirty year-old Stage IV Survivor. She lives in Wanganui, New Zealand with her partner and their little boy, although she also has lived in Oregon. She has used both traditional and complementary medicine in her treatment course.

Here Alisa shares with us about her utilization of CAM:

Tell us about your diagnosis:

I was diagnosed 10 months ago with stage IV rectal cancer with mets on all lobes of liver and FAP (familial adenomatous polyposis). I was diagnosed 4 days after my baby boy was born. That week was a big emotional rollercoaster!!! I have no family history, and I had very few signs or symptoms.

Before your diagnoses, did you utilize any kind of CAM in your general health? How familiar were you with these kinds of practices and products?

I have always been interested in holistic health. I studied pre-med and exercise science in University, and worked as a personal trainer and nutrition consultant. I have seen first hand how exercise, diet, supplements, and mind/body therapies can improve specific problems and overall health and fitness. Also, living in the States, I generally found conventional medicine very expensive and useless, which even more so encouraged me to seek holistic health.

What led you to look into it with your diagnoses?

Though I've always been open to CAM, after my diagnosis it seemed to kind of find me. At my initial diagnosis the doctors told me, "you have maybe 6 months without treatment, to a year with treatment". Choosing to ignore this, seeing as conventional medicine basically didn't have much hope for my prognosis I decided

memorize a loved one touched by this disease. Each page tells the story of a special person and provides the opportunity to make an online donation to CCA in their honor. It's a meaningful way to support the vital work of ending the suffering caused by colorectal cancer. And it is a meaningful way to honor the courage and hope of those who face or have faced colorectal cancer.

Undy 5000

Undy 5000. . .Not Your Typical 5K

The Undy 5000 is a 5000 meter (5K) race to fight colorectal cancer. But it's not your typical 5K.

Participants in the Undy 5000 are encouraged to run or walk in their underwear.

We think it's time to make people talk about colorectal cancer. And we can't think of a better way than a parade of people in their boxers and bloomers parading down the street.

to seek other help. Before I even looked I had a close friend of my mother-in-law recommend glyconutrients to me, as she feels this had saved her daughter. She offered a lot of hope and encouragement, and introduced me to practitioners and other cancer survivors who support and believe in CAM.

How did you go about finding CAM practitioners? How did you find ones you could trust?

Most I found through recommendations, and one specialized in cancer treatment. I think it's really important to trust your gut feeling about everything. It should feel comfortable and right. I always go to professionals who are certified and trained with years of experience. I do ask them their experience with cancer patients with similar diagnosis, and the kind of results that they've seen. I always go prepared and ask a lot of questions.

What has been the greatest benefit you see thus far?

It's hard to say what the greatest benefit has been, but here are a few reasons why I strongly believe CAM helps me:

First, I'd say that a huge benefit is that I haven't really ever been sick. I did chemo (Xeloda & Oxaliplatin) for 5 months, and only got sick for one week. . . a bit before and during this week I had slacked off on my supplements! Throughout my chemo I had very little side effects, my blood work was always normal, and I had excellent results! I got my first PET/CT after finishing chemo and it concluded "no metabolic malignancy", which meant my cancer was "inactive"! After my bowel surgery, I was in the hospital for 15 days, and I didn't get back into CAM for weeks after arriving home. Unfortunately, my most recent scan shows the cancer is active again in the liver, and I can't help but wonder if it's due to a combination of my immune system being suppressed after surgery and not boosting it with CAM as I was in the past!

I've also helped my body heal itself. One example I have of this is before my surgery two months ago I asked for a follow-up colonoscopy to see if there had been any change. Several doctors had told me polyps don't go away unless removed, though several naturopaths believed that they could. The doctors were very surprised to see that 2/3's of the polyps, which once lined my large intestine were gone!

I feel good mentally. Though I've had a bad day here and there, I've not let the cancer get into my mind. The mind/body therapies have really helped me, and I think believing that you will beat it is one of the biggest factors to surviving!

[For more of our interview with Alisa, please visit the Colon Cancer Alliance Page on My CRC Connections where all of our E-Newsletter archives can be found from this issue forward.](#)





Whole Body Health Quick List

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Here are some interesting things to keep in mind as you work toward whole body health and wellbeing:

- Dr. Catherine Chodkiewicz from Moffitt Cancer Center warns patients to "NOT take anti-oxidants in a pill form during chemotherapy (e.g. vitamin A, C, or E)." Why not? They reduce the efficacy of the chemo.

- Here is a simple guideline for using herbs and supplements:

If you put it in your mouth, speak to your doctor first.

- Are you a survivor of CRC? A study at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston showed CRC survivors who ate a diet high in fat, with lots of red meat, and simple carbohydrates were more than three times as likely to have a recurrence of CRC than those who followed a low-fat diet rich in vegetables, lean chicken and fish. (Source: JAMA. 2007;298(7):754-764.)

- Want to eat as healthy as possible, but worry about the rising cost of food, especially organics? Check out the Environmental Working Group's "[Shoppers Guide to Pesticides in Food](#)" for a handy reference. You can even print off a copy to take with you to the market!

- What does it mean to lead a healthy lifestyle and incorporate exercise? [The Harvard School of Public Health recommends five days of brisk walking](#) (or its equivalent) for 30 minutes as the bare minimum. In short, any is better than none, and more is better than some. Interested in even more information? Investigate [Metabolic Equivalency Rates](#) and shoot for a 20 or better per week, per Dr. Chodkiewicz.

- Learning relaxation techniques or participating in relaxation activities can help your overall sense of wellbeing and helps to manage anxiety. Examples include: Meditation, Biofeedback, Hypnosis, Yoga, Imagery, Tai Chi, Reiki, Healing Touch, and Massage.

- Pay attention to your spirit. For some this will mean being connected to or reconnecting with their religion of choice. For others, it will be finding ways to nurture their inner being through prayer, pilgrimage paths, reading, music, art, or the love of family and friends. What works best? What works for you. Remember: It is normal for any crisis, including a cancer diagnoses, to force change upon us. Spiritual questioning is a normal part of that process.

- CAM techniques may not change the size of your tumors, but they may help you to feel better while dealing with them. Don't underestimate the power of feeling empowered!

- ALWAYS talk to your doctor before utilizing any CAM methodology. This may seem daunting, but you need your oncologist or primary care physician to help you to make sure all aspects of your treatment plan work together for your good. [Click here for important resources to help you with this vital conversation.](#)

- Check out the CAM Quick Links to the right for some websites with more information on Integrative Medicine.

- [We also have a CAM Discussion Group on My CRC Connections.](#) Join this important conversation!

The Genetic Link

In 2003 the US Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health completed the Human Genome Project. One of the main goals of this project was to identify the 20,000-25,000 genes in human DNA. Why is this so important? Our DNA is comprised of millions of base pairs. These base pairs form 46 chromosomes--23 from our mother and 23 from our father. Within our chromosomes there are thousands of genes. Our genes carry the instructions to create proteins, and these proteins each serve a particular function in



the body. Take our skin: The genes dictate instructions to the skin on top of our heads to grow hair (well, for most of us), and they also dictate that the skin on the bottom of our feet does not, which is good because shaving the bottoms of our feet sounds like a daunting task! Every cell in our body relies on genetic instructions to behave properly.

Simply put: Cancer is cells behaving badly. Cancer occurs when there is a gene mutation that causes the instructions to be wrong. One small change can add up to a big problem, but those changes do not just occur due to the chromosomes from mom and dad—environmental causes may also play a part. The point of understanding the genetic link is to prepare a good offense against the possibility of developing cancer by modifying lifestyle, assessing the best screening options and timetable, and sometimes seeking preventative treatment. For those who face colorectal cancer, the genetic link can be important.

First of all, a family history of colorectal cancer increases the chance one might develop colorectal cancer at some point (20-25%). Have you ever compiled a medical family tree? The Society of Genetic Counselors has [a great tool](#) to help you get started. Simply because you have a family history does not mean you have a known major genetic mutation. At the moment, the two most commonly known and understood genetic mutations are familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) and hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC), which is also known as "Lynch syndrome." Both of these require testing in order to determine with certainty the presence of these hereditary colorectal cancer syndromes. Genetic counseling will also help you and your loved ones determine your "best offense," including increased screening at younger ages.

Let us direct you to [Genetic Health](#). This informative website provides more information on genetics in general, genetic testing, some of the ethical issues genetic testing brings up (including, but not limited to, issues with insurance companies), suggestions on how to go about selecting a genetic counselor, and information specifically related to heredity and colorectal cancer. As we said before, we are not endorsing any particular group, but we do want to make these resources available to you. Another resource for more information about genetic testing is your own treatment team, who can direct you to testing in your area. Finally, most major university affiliated hospitals have a fully staffed genetics group made up of both doctors and genetic counselors.

[Make sure to check out the Genetics Discussion Group on My CRC Connections.](#)

This is a great place to communicate with other survivors and caregivers about the genetic issues related to colorectal cancer.

Check out our websites:

[Colon Cancer Alliance](#)

[My CRC Connections: An online community for those affected by colorectal cancer.](#)

[Undy 5000: A brief run to fight colorectal cancer.](#)