



Integrative medicine is a patient-centered, evidence-informed field of comprehensive cancer care that uses mind-body practices, natural products, and lifestyle modifications from different traditions alongside conventional cancer treatments to promote optimal health and well-being. An integrative medicine approach ideally combines the best of Western medicine, evidence-based complementary approaches, and lifestyle practices by addressing the full range of physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and environmental influences that affect an individual's overall health.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL, COMPLEMENTARY, ALTERNATIVE, AND INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE?

When describing different approaches to care, people often use the terms complementary medicine, alternative medicine, and integrative medicine interchangeably. However, the terms refer to different approaches to medical care and have notable differences.

- **Conventional Medicine:** Also sometimes called Western, traditional, or modern medicine, this term refers to the standard methods of healing or treating disease that are taught in Western medical schools. Some examples of conventional medicine include medication, physical rehabilitation, psychotherapy, surgery, and radiation. Conventional medicine is used to prevent, diagnose, and treat symptoms and conditions.
- **Complementary Medicine:** This term describes any non-mainstream approach that is used together with conventional medicine but is not considered by itself to be standard treatment. Complementary interventions refer to a wide range of healing approaches that are used in addition to standard medical approaches that are meant to complement the treatment. Some examples of complementary medicine include nutrition, yoga, probiotics, guided imagery, aromatherapy, breathing, relaxation techniques, massage, herbal medicine, acupuncture, Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese Medicine, homeopathy, naturopathy, and functional medicine.
- **Alternative Medicine:** This term describes any non-mainstream approach that is used in place of standard conventional medicine. This approach does not include any other type of care, especially conventional medicine. Examples of alternative medicine include using a special diet alone, or intravenous infusions of vitamin C alone to treat the cancer instead of taking cancer drugs that are being recommended by an oncologist.

- **Integrative Medicine:** This term describes bringing various combinations of conventional and complementary medicine together in a coordinated way. Integrative medicine emphasizes the use of two or more combined approaches, and there is an emphasis on treating the whole person rather than treating any one disease or symptom.

SHOULD ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE EVER BE USED IN PLACE OF CONVENTIONAL MEDICINE TO TREAT CANCER?

No. Delaying the start of a proven therapy to try an alternative medicine approach can be dangerous and could even be fatal. Standard-of-care treatments are recommended because they have been proven safe and effective through rigorous clinical trials. There is no robust evidence that alternative medicine approaches treat the cancer or improve survival. Therefore, alternative medicine is not a safe approach.

ARE THERE ANY HERBAL OR DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS THAT ARE HELPFUL?

Herbal and dietary supplements are often advertised as alternative treatments for cancer and other health conditions. However, there is no definitive proof that these complementary therapies work, they may be harmful when taken by themselves or in large doses, and strong evidence about whether they are safe and effective is severely lacking.

Natural does not mean safe. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate supplements. This means ingredients can vary, which can have an additional impact on safety and effectiveness. Using unproven herbal or dietary supplements can cause direct injury or lead to worsening symptoms, and some herbal supplements can potentially interact negatively with medications. Even if your healthcare provider approves their use, you may need to stop taking supplements when undergoing certain medical procedures or lab tests. It is of utmost importance to always share any herbs, vitamins, or other



supplements you are taking (or planning on taking) with your healthcare team, no matter how safe you think they are.

WHAT ABOUT GREEN TEA?

Green tea is an herbal supplement consumed for centuries due to its potential medicinal benefits. Some small studies have suggested that an active ingredient in green tea called epigallocatechin-gallate (EGCG) may have some benefit. Yet other studies have shown that the amount of EGCG that is needed to be potentially beneficial can cause liver and gastrointestinal toxicities (so close laboratory monitoring is necessary), may reduce the effectiveness of cancer medications, and too little is known about how it can potentially interact with targeted treatments used as the current standard of care to treat CLL and SLL. Without much larger phase III clinical trials, the use of EGCG cannot be recommended.

IS INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE A SAFE APPROACH?

Yes. Physical, nutritional, and psychological interventions used alongside conventional medicine are generally considered not to be dangerous for most people. The potential benefit of some complementary interventions is still uncertain. However, many interventions have little risk of harm when recommended and approved by a healthcare provider. Some complementary therapies have undergone careful evaluation (i.e., acupuncture, yoga, and meditation to name a few) and have been found to be safe, effective, and perhaps even increase the effectiveness of conventional treatments.

Some reports document that lifestyle changes can provide significant benefits and even remission, but these lifestyle changes have not been well-studied in clinical trials. It is widely accepted that engaging

in appropriate exercise, following a healthy diet, maintaining good sleeping habits, and reducing stress through meditation and other techniques can help individuals better manage their disease. The following interventions are typically gentle, harmless, and may help to enhance the overall sense of well-being:

- **Physical Interventions** (lifestyle modification and manual therapies): Physical activity and exercise, acupuncture, massage therapy, yoga, tai chi, or qi gong.
- **Nutritional Interventions:** Balanced, healthy eating using a Mediterranean-style diet, and avoiding processed foods or excessive sugar.
- **Psychological Interventions:** Mindfulness, meditation, hypnosis, relaxation techniques, spiritual practices, and creative outlets such as art, music, or dance.

WHAT ARE THE OVERALL BENEFITS OF AN INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE APPROACH FOR THOSE LIVING WITH CLL OR SLL?

Integrative medicine can be used as part of a holistic, personalized, and proactive approach to treating the cancer at any stage of the disease. Additionally, this approach empowers active participation in your care. Complementary therapies can reduce the symptom burden associated with cancer and the side effects of certain treatments (such as fatigue and nausea), optimize overall health, and improve overall quality of life.

CLL SOCIETY MISSION

CLL Society is an inclusive, patient-centric, physician-curated nonprofit organization that addresses the unmet needs of the chronic lymphocytic leukemia and small lymphocytic lymphoma (CLL/SLL) community through patient education, advocacy, support, and research.