

UNDERSTANDING THE 2022 ASCO/SIO CANCER PAIN MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

FAST FACTS

- Evidence in a guideline from the Society for Integrative Oncology (SIO) and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) supports using some integrative approaches to relieve pain in adults with cancer.
- Acupuncture, acupressure, reflexology, hypnosis, Hatha yoga, guided imagery, massage, and music therapy can help relieve cancer pain when used properly.
- Integrative approaches can help relieve different types of pain: joint pain from aromatase inhibitors, general pain, musculoskeletal pain, peripheral neuropathy (nerve problems) from chemotherapy, pain from procedures and surgery, and pain during palliative care.

How Integrative Treatments Can Relieve Cancer Pain

Many people with cancer have pain during and after treatment for cancer. The pain can be due to the cancer or from the treatments. Integrative approaches are a way to relieve your pain. They are also called complementary treatments.

How can integrative approaches help relieve pain?

Integrative treatments are used along with conventional care as part of your cancer care plan. “You don’t always have to rely on a prescription medicine to address cancer pain,” says Richard T. Lee, MD. “There are effective integrative approaches that help patients manage their pain and potentially use less medications, which often come with more side effects.” Dr. Lee is a member of the expert panel that developed the guideline and a clinical professor in the Departments of Supportive Care Medicine and Medical Oncology at the City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center.

How do I know if integrative approaches work?

“There is growing evidence that integrative therapies can have a real impact on cancer pain,” says Dr. Lee. *Integrative Medicine for Pain Management in Oncology: SIO-ASCO Guideline* recommends specific integrative treatments for different types of pain. Developed by SIO and ASCO, the guideline focuses on patient-centered and evidence-based integrative approaches to pain management.

How was the guideline developed?

The SIO and the ASCO formed an expert panel to review the evidence about integrative treatments for cancer pain. The panel included experts in integrative oncology, medical oncology, radiation oncology, surgical oncology, palliative care, social sciences, mind-body medicine, nursing, and patient representatives.

The experts wanted to answer two key questions:

- What mind-body therapies are recommended for managing pain experienced by adult and pediatric patients diagnosed with cancer?
- What natural products are recommended for managing pain experienced by adult and pediatric patients diagnosed with cancer?

They reviewed individual research trial reports and results of reviews of groups of studies.

They did this by reviewing individual clinical trials, reviews designed to answer a specific question based on results of multiple studies, and studies that analyze and combine results from several similar studies.

The guideline has the experts’ recommendations for using integrative treatments to manage cancer pain in adults. Also, it describes the amount and quality of evidence for each integrative treatment.

SIO and ASCO are partnering on further guidelines which will incorporate integrative approaches to for helping cancer-related symptoms and address side effects from cancer treatments.

The Best Integrative Treatments for Cancer Pain in Adults

Acupuncture, acupressure, reflexology, hypnosis, Hatha yoga, guided imagery, massage, and music therapy can help relieve specific types of cancer pain.

Which integrative treatments work best and for what types of pain?

The benefits of the integrative treatments recommended by the expert panel outweigh the potential harms. The expert panel found the strongest evidence for the following:

Acupuncture for joint pain from aromatase inhibitors

Aromatase inhibitors (AIs) are commonly used in hormone-receptor positive breast cancer patients after surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy to lower risk of recurrence and also to treat metastatic disease. Radiation therapy and AIs can cause significant joint pain for many patients.

The expert panel also recommended the below integrative treatments to relieve these specific types of cancer pain.

General pain and musculoskeletal pain:

- Acupuncture
- Guided imagery
- Hatha yoga
- Massage
- Reflexology or acupressure

Peripheral neuropathy from chemotherapy:

- Acupuncture
- Reflexology or acupressure

Cancer-induced peripheral neuropathy is a nerve problem that causes pain, numbness, tingling, swelling, or muscle weakness. The pain can be in different parts of the body, most commonly in the hands and feet.

Pain from procedures and surgery:

- Acupuncture or acupressure
- Hypnosis
- Music therapy

Pain during palliative care:

- Massage

Massage can be useful at any stage of the disease. Massage has been shown to help with pain in the general (non-cancer) setting, but the evidence for patients with cancer was only for use during palliative care.

Why isn't there more evidence about integrative approaches for cancer pain?

The recommendations are based on an intermediate level of evidence. This means that the benefit of each recommended integrative treatment outweighs the risk. The strength of the recommendations is moderate. This means that the recommendations may change when more evidence is available. The expert panel did not have enough evidence to recommend for or against other integrative treatments, including natural products, or to make recommendations for children with cancer.

Not having more evidence now does not mean that integrative treatments do not work. Some may work better than current evidence shows because they have not been adequately studied. "Integrative therapy clinical trials are more challenging to conduct than clinical trials for conventional therapies," says Dr. Lee.

The most reliable evidence comes from randomized clinical trials, which compare one treatment to a placebo or another treatment. A placebo is a pill that looks like the real medicine but doesn't contain any medicine. Other examples of placebo include sham acupuncture in which the needles appear to be the same as in real acupuncture, however, they are not inserted into the skin.

But researchers are finding better ways to study integrative treatments for cancer, according to Dr. Lee. They are conducting larger clinical trials of integrative treatments and studying the effectiveness of integrative treatments compared to usual care. For example, a study might compare a drug that is commonly used to treat cancer pain compared to acupuncture.

How to Find Integrative Approaches for Cancer Pain

You can and should get help for your cancer pain.

How do I find integrative approaches for cancer pain?

Work with your oncologist to decide which treatments, including integrative treatments, may be best for you. Your oncologist may be able to refer you to or help you find the right integrative treatments.

It is okay for you to mention the integrative pain medicine guidelines. You can even bring a copy of the [guideline](#) to your appointment. "Oncologists know that they can rely on guidelines from SIO and ASCO," says Dr. Lee.

What do I do if my cancer center doesn't have integrative treatments?

If your cancer center does not offer integrative medicine or integrative oncology services, your oncologist should still be able to help you find integrative treatments. Also, you can look for other cancer centers or health-oriented community nonprofits in your area that offer integrative treatments.

Are these treatments covered by insurance?

While many insurance companies now cover at least some of the costs for some integrative treatments, coverage varies. Contact your insurance company to see what your plan covers. Ask them if they cover treatments from the latest international guidelines for pain.

If your insurance does not cover integrative treatments or offer enough coverage, look at services at cancer centers near you. “Some cancer centers offer integrative treatments at a lower rate or have a sliding scale,” says Dr. Lee.

Resource List

Use these resources to help relieve your cancer pain.

Cancer pain

- [The Pocket Guide to Cancer Pain](#) provides an overview of cancer pain and highlights therapies to help combat pain. Compiled by the Healing Works Foundation.
- [Managing Cancer-Related Pain: A Guide for Patients, Families, and Caregivers from the American Society of Clinical Oncology](#) covers the importance of pain relief and includes pain management options and ways to communicate about pain with the cancer care team. Compiled by the American Society for Clinical Oncology.

Pain management guidelines

- [Snapshot of SIO/ASCO Pain Guidelines for Cancer Patients](#) is a short video with highlights from the SIO and ASCO pain guideline. From the Healing Works Foundation.
- [Integrative Medicine for Pain Management in Oncology](#) includes evidence-based recommendations for providers on integrative approaches to managing pain in adults with cancer. From the SIO and ASCO.

Finding and paying for integrative treatments for pain

- [Directory of Integrative Healthcare Professionals](#) includes health care practitioners who’ve completed a fellowship in integrative medicine. From the University of Arizona Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine.
- [How Do I Talk to My Doctor About Complementary and Integrative Methods?](#) offers questions to ask your cancer care team. From the American Cancer Society.
- [6 Things to Know When Selecting a Complementary Health Practitioner](#) includes tips for searching for a complementary health practitioner. From the NIH National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.
- [Will My Insurance Cover Complementary and Integrative Therapies?](#) is an overview with questions to ask your insurance company. From the American Cancer Society.

- [Talking about Complementary and Alternative Medicine with Health Care Providers: A Workbook and Tips](#). This 15-page workbook provides a one-stop resource for all your Complementary and Alternative Medicine conversation and tracking needs. From the NIH Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

Free and low-cost options for integrative modalities

- [Smith Center for Healing and the Arts](#) is a nonprofit health, education, and arts organization with many free and low-cost webinars and online events related to integrative approaches to cancer care.
- [Inova Life with Cancer](#), a program of Inova Schar Cancer, is a nonprofit organization providing education and psychosocial support to all individuals impacted by cancer through evidence-based holistic care at no cost.

My Notes and Questions

Reference

1. Mae JJ, Ismaila N, Bao T, et al. Integrative Medicine for Pain Management in Oncology: Society for Integrative Oncology–ASCO Guideline. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2022; 40(34): 3998-4024. <https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/JCO.22.01357>. Accessed 4/28/23.