

*Thoughts on*  
*Living with Cancer*

**An Introduction  
to Alternative/Complementary  
Therapies for Cancer**



*by Caren S. Fried, Ph.D.*

## My Personal Experience

*In 1994, I was told those fateful words:* “You have cancer.” At that time, I was 35 years old, a biologist, wife, and mother of a two year old. I was diagnosed with lung cancer, even though I had never smoked. My cancer treatments included two major lung surgeries (which resulted in the removal of my right lung), various standard and experimental aggressive chemotherapy treatments, and numerous alternative therapies. Despite all this, my cancer persisted. But so did I!

A turning point occurred for me when I decided to focus on my health instead of my illness. I believe that cancer is an illness of the body, mind, heart, and soul. Therefore, for me being healthy meant dealing with the emotional, psychological, and spiritual issues related to cancer as well as undergoing the physical treatments. In addition to the various conventional and alternative therapies which I pursued, writing became an important part of my own healing journey with cancer. To be able to express my emotions, thoughts, and beliefs in writing was critically important for my own overall health.

These pamphlets grew from the numerous notes that I wrote every day in my healing journal. The information that is available for newly diagnosed cancer patients can sometimes be overwhelming. It was my intention, therefore, to write short pamphlets concerning various topics that deal with the practical issues of living each day with cancer. I hope that these pamphlets will encourage discussion of topics that are often difficult yet necessary to deal with and to help cancer patients and their families make the numerous decisions that need to be made during this time.

Healing is a very personal issue and each person must find his/her own path to healing from cancer. To this day, I continue to focus on my health each day, to live a full active life as a mother and wife, and to pursue a new career as a writer despite cancer. It is my hope that these pamphlets will be useful for others seeking out a healing journey while living with cancer and beyond.

*Caren S. Fried*

# *Thoughts on* --- *Living with Cancer*

## **An Introduction to Alternative/Complementary Therapies for Cancer**

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# ***An Introduction to Alternative/Complementary Therapies for Cancer***

*I firmly believe that a combination of an immune-enhancing diet and acupuncture kept me healthy during my chemotherapy treatments despite very low blood counts.* —C.F.

**A**lternative therapies generally refer to those therapies that are not considered part of mainstream Western medicine. They are also referred to as complementary, holistic, or unconventional therapies. While Western medicine treats the disease, alternative therapies treat the person who has the illness. In the treatment of cancer, alternative therapies focus on strengthening the self-healing abilities of the individual. In addition, alternative therapies can be very helpful in relieving stress and reducing pain.

Many alternative therapies are beginning to gain recognition by mainstream physicians as helpful in the fight against cancer. Most alternative therapies can be used in conjunction with conventional treatments; thus the term complementary therapies. In fact, many studies have shown that alternative therapies can en-



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hance the effectiveness of conventional Western treatments. Alternative therapies can also be used alone if you choose not to undergo Western medical treatments.

There is a tremendous amount of information on alternative therapies for cancer. Be cautious of anyone or anything that proclaims a miraculous cure. It is important to seek advice from reputable health professionals who are well-educated in their field. There are also numerous books available to read concerning alternative therapies. Be an informed consumer and educate yourself.

The following is a summary of some of the more common types of alternative therapies for cancer treatment. This is by no means a complete list. This is meant to be a guideline for choosing those therapies that you wish to investigate further.

### ***Psychotherapy and Support Groups***

It has been shown that expression of emotions, feelings, and thoughts is critical to living with cancer as well as recovering from cancer. This can be accomplished by working individually with a qualified therapist and/or by joining a support group.

Emotional and psychological issues surrounding a cancer diagnosis are very different from other difficult life situations. Therefore, it is very important, when seeking a psychotherapist, to find one who is experienced in working with cancer patients.

Support groups can be very beneficial by providing a place where you can share your thoughts and feelings openly with others who are also facing the tremendous challenges of living with cancer. Be cautious, however, as support groups can be good or bad depending on the people who go to them and the

focus of the group. In general, if you feel better when you leave the group, then go back. If you find yourself more depressed after going to the group, then look for a different group.

### ***Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)***

TCM treats illness as an imbalance in the energy flows in your body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, a rebalancing of these aspects can lead to healing. People, rather than the disease, are treated. TCM focuses on the use of acupuncture and Chinese herbs to rebalance the energy flows and boost your immune system in order to increase your body's self-healing abilities.

### ***Exercise***

Routine exercise is very important for your health. Walking is an excellent exercise for the mind, body, and soul. Breathing exercises are also important. Meditative exercises such as Yoga, T'ai Chi or Chi Gong can also be very valuable.

### ***Nutrition***

Recently, much research has shown that diet and supplements can be helpful in the treatment of cancer as well as prevention. Various foods and supplements (including vitamins, minerals, herbs, and teas) can enhance the effectiveness of a person's immune system. They can also help cleanse your body by removing toxic by-products of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery.

The information available on diet and supplements can sometimes be overwhelming and advice can vary widely. Many physicians have little training in nutrition. It is important to educate yourself by reading books and speaking with various health professionals.

  
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...various relaxation techniques can help increase the immune system's ability to fight cancer.

It is best to find a qualified nutritionist who works specifically with cancer patients. In general, the healthiest diets are those that emphasize fresh vegetables and whole grains while minimizing meat, dairy, sugar, hydrogenated oils, and processed foods.

### ***Relaxation, Meditation, and Visual Imagery***

The mind can be a powerful tool in the recovery from illness. It is possible to learn ways to use your mind to help heal your body. In this endeavor, it is critical to find a therapist who is experienced in working with cancer patients.

Many researchers have shown that various relaxation techniques can help increase the immune system's ability to fight cancer. In addition, relaxation techniques can help reduce stress from the cancer diagnosis and pain from the cancer or the treatments.

Meditation enables you to get in touch with your inner wisdom, to learn what is happening in your body, mind, and soul, and to learn what you need to do to heal yourself. Meditation can be done by anyone. There are several different ways of doing meditation and you can learn which one works best for you.

Visual imagery has been shown by some researchers to be a valuable tool in the fight against cancer. Being able to visualize your disease, your treatment, and your body's own defense system can be critically important in recovering from cancer. Visual imagery can also be very useful for pain relief.

### ***Energy healing***

Eastern medical philosophies believe that it is the flow of vital energy (known as chi in Chinese) through your body that keeps you healthy. If this flow is blocked, physical and mental illness can occur. By unblocking this energy and rebalancing the body's en-

ergy, true healing of the mind, body, and spirit can occur. Energy healing can be done through acupuncture (see TCM above), acupressure, massage therapy, therapeutic touch, Reiki, and more.

### ***Prayer and spiritual healing***

For people who believe strongly in their own religion, prayer can be very healing. Spiritual healing can also occur through recognition of your inner wisdom and a deep understanding of your soul. Creating a personal healing altar or performing various healing rituals can also be comforting and empowering.

### ***Homeopathy***

Homeopathic remedies are dilutions of natural substances from plants, minerals, and animals. Homeopathy is based on the idea that the same substances that in large doses produce symptoms of an illness can cure the illness when used in very minute doses. By ingesting minute quantities, homeopathic remedies stimulate the body's natural healing responses.

### ***Ayurvedic medicine***

Ayurvedic medicine has been practiced in India for over 5000 years. Ayurvedic doctors first identify the patient's metabolic blood type. Then a specific treatment plan is designed to restore the balance in the individual's body, mind, and spirit. Treatments may include dietary changes, exercise, yoga, meditation, herbal tonics, and more.

### ***Conclusion***

By enhancing the self-healing abilities of the individual, alternative therapies can strengthen the body to fight the cancer itself. These therapies can also be used

  
***Spiritual healing can also occur through recognition of your inner wisdom and a deep understanding of your soul.***



*...use your own intuition in choosing which alternative therapies will work best for you.*

to complement conventional cancer treatments and lessen their harmful side effects.

The amount of information on alternative therapies can sometimes be overwhelming. It is important to educate yourself by seeking advice from reputable health professionals and reading much information on your own. It is also important to use your own intuition in choosing which alternative therapies will work best for you.



## ***Thoughts on Living with Cancer Pamphlets***

Cancer as a Whole-Body Illness



How to Be an Active Participant in Your Own Recovery:  
Guidelines for the Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patient.



Coping with Hair Loss Due to Chemotherapy



Positive Thinking - Helpful or Harmful for Cancer Patients?



Suggestions for Friends and Relatives of the Cancer Patient



An Introduction to Alternative/Complementary Therapies for Cancer



Being a Parent with Cancer



Diagnosis Cancer: Why Me?



Healing and Dying



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