

# Study finds high use of complementary methods among cancer survivors

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A new study from researchers at the American Cancer Society finds many cancer patients use complementary and alternative methods, most often prayer, relaxation, supplements, meditation, and massage. Meanwhile, the use of other methods, such as biofeedback, homeopathy, and acupuncture, are relatively uncommon. The study, appearing in the American Cancer Society peer review journal *Cancer*, also finds women, younger survivors, whites, individuals with higher income, and those with more education were more likely to use complementary methods (CM).

The study confirmed the findings of previous surveys that found cancer patients use the same complementary methods used among the general population and among people with other chronic diseases, such as spiritual practices, relaxation methods, and dietary supplements.

"Our study found that several CM types are used by nearly half of cancer survivors," said Ted Gansler, M.D., American Cancer Society and study co-author. "Surprisingly, other methods such as acupuncture and hypnosis were used by fewer than 2% of cancer survivors, even though recent studies found them to be useful in relieving some cancer-related symptoms, such as pain. We also found that the use of various CM types is significantly influenced by gender, race, age, education, cancer type, and how far the cancer had spread."

Previous studies on the use of complementary methods have relied on data from patients at a single or a few centers, which seldom provide

nationally representative samples. Those studies have used small sample sizes, have focused on a single or few cancer types, and have involved patients in active treatment. For the current study, researchers used data from more than 4,000 survivors of ten different cancers participating in the American Cancer Society's Study of Cancer Survivors-I (SCS-I) who were surveyed 10 to 24 months after diagnosis.

Survivors were asked if they had used any of 19 CMs to deal with their cancer. The CMs most frequently reported were prayer/spiritual practice (61.4%), relaxation (44.3%), faith/spiritual healing (42.4%), nutritional supplements/vitamins (40.1%), meditation (15%), religious counseling (11.3%), massage (11.2%), and support groups (9.7%). The least prevalent CMs were hypnosis (0.4%), biofeedback therapy (1.0%), and acupuncture/acupressure (1.2%).

The study also found cancer type was a significant predictor of CM use. Melanoma and kidney cancer survivors were least likely to use CMs, whereas breast and ovarian cancer survivors were most likely to use them.

Source: American Cancer Society

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