

Male cancer patients turn to alternative treatments

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(Medical Xpress) -- More than 50% of men diagnosed with cancer in Australia are turning to complementary and alternative medicine to help find a cure, or to improve their health, according to new research from the University of Adelaide.

Psychology PhD student Nadja Klafke says an Adelaide questionnaire of 400 men with various [types of cancer](#) shows that many of them modify their diet in conjunction with conventional treatment, as well as turning to meditation, yoga and exercise.

The study, recently published in [Annals of Oncology](#), provides evidence that the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is common and widespread in men with cancer.

"Many [complementary therapies](#) have the potential to help reduce common side-effects of [cancer treatment](#) and disease symptoms," Ms Klafke says.

"For example, published data shows that acupuncture and acupressure may relieve chemotherapy- induced [nausea and vomiting](#), hypnosis and massage are beneficial for cancer-related pain, and meditation and relaxation techniques can relieve fatigue," Ms Klafke says.

"The popularity of CAM use in cancer sufferers presumably reflects the benefits - real or perceived - by those who use them."

Dietary supplements are the most common natural therapy used by men suffering cancer. Prayer has been identified as the second most popular CAM therapy and herbs and botanicals rank third, despite warnings from cancer clinicians that herbs such as Echinacea, St John's wort, Ginseng and Gingko biloba can react badly with prescribed medications.

The study suggests that many men are turning to alternative options because they are either dissatisfied with the results from conventional medical treatments, or pressured by their spouse or family to try something different.

While this study focused on male cancer outpatients living in Adelaide, other studies around the world have demonstrated that culture plays a large part in determining which herbs and dietary supplements are favoured.

Ms Klafke says the findings show that oncologists are not aware that most male cancer patients use alternative treatments in conjunction with conventional medicine.

"It would definitely be worth clinicians having an open discussion with their patients about the efficacy and safety of complementary and alternative medicine. A better understanding of the role, reasons for use and benefits of CAM may lead to more holistic approaches to care," she says.

The study is the first in the world to specifically assess CAM use by men with a wide variety of cancers.

More information: annonc.oxfordjournals.org/

Provided by University of Adelaide

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