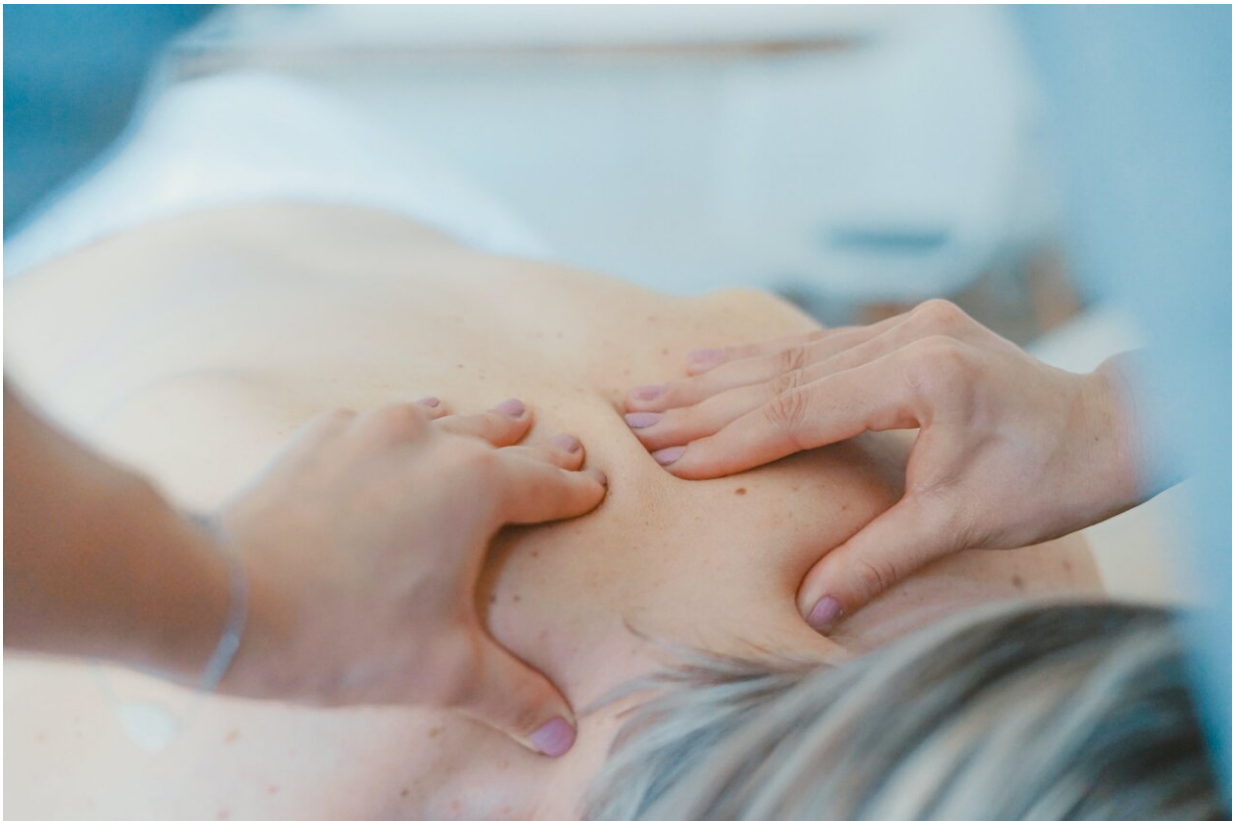


# Survey says the majority of cancer patients are interested in complementary therapies

October 12 2023

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Patients and oncologists are supportive of complementary therapies, such as nutrition counseling, exercise, massage, and mediation, for cancer treatment, according to a new survey conducted on behalf of the

Healing Works Foundation. However, a disconnect exists between this growing interest and oncologists' perceptions of patient support. One-third of oncologists said their patients lack interest in these therapies, but only 13% of cancer patients cite lack of interest when asked about barriers.

"Navigating a [cancer diagnosis](#) is about treating the whole person, not just the disease," said Wayne Jonas, MD, President of Healing Works, a non-profit dedicated to the integration of healing and curing in routine health care delivery.

"Oncologists are the single most influential factor in patient treatment decisions, and doctors must be educating themselves to help drive patient outcomes and treatment satisfaction. They need to understand that [patients](#) increasingly want to hear directly about all possible support during and after treatment of the cancer."

More than 60% of cancer patients strongly believe in [complementary therapies](#), and 71% want their [health systems](#) to offer them, according to the survey of more than 1,000 patients and 150 oncologists conducted in June and July. In fact, 55% of patients would have chosen a health system with more complementary therapies if they could go back in time, up substantially from 40% a year ago.

Among oncologists, most (57%) believe that complementary therapies are effective at managing the side effects of treatments, while a third (33%) indicate that they improve overall survival.

Yet, when asked about usage, perceptions differed: 64% of [cancer patients](#) report using at least one complementary therapy, yet most of them never informed their oncologists. As a result, oncologists think only 40% of patients use one of these approaches.

"A communication gap—not an interest gap—appears to be one of the biggest barriers between patients and oncologists when exploring complementary options to support overall treatment," said Jonas.

"Clinicians need to be proactive and talk to their patients about evidence-based integrative health options early in the process, before patients go exploring on their own, and possibly getting into trouble."

Patients also noted additional barriers to adoption, including the need for education about the benefits, reimbursement or other funding help, and a lack of guidance from their oncologist. Oncologists agree that insurance reimbursement is a major barrier, but also report that health systems do not have enough physical therapists, psychologists, and pain specialists to offer these therapies.

Patient usage of complementary therapies also varied among demographic groups:

- Hispanic (92%) and African American (83%) patients report the highest usage of complementary therapies and are interested in learning more about them.
- Seventy percent of [female patients](#) support the use of complementary therapies, while actual usage is nearly equal between men (62%) and women (66%).
- Younger patients (ages 18-50) are more likely to use a range of complementary therapies, especially mental health support/therapy, nutrition counseling and meditation or mindfulness.

More information on the survey findings and the Healing Works Foundation can be found at

[www.HealingWorksFoundation.org/CancerSurvey2023](http://www.HealingWorksFoundation.org/CancerSurvey2023).

Provided by The Reis Group

Citation: Survey says the majority of cancer patients are interested in complementary therapies (2023, October 12) retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-10-survey-majority-cancer-patients-complementary.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.