

## Complementary (Herbal) Nutrition

### Introduction:

Many people with cancer are keen to try herbal remedies to help “cure” their cancer or help to reduce symptoms such as nausea and vomiting. There are no herbal remedies which will cure cancer; however there may be some herbal remedies that help your symptoms and make you feel better. The following table lists different herbal remedies that people often ask about. Although herbal medicine is the oldest form of medicine and used by the large proportion of the world's population research in this area is limited, and so there is little scientific evidence to support their use. It is a misconception that herbal medicines are totally safe, although side effects are uncommon they can occur and they can interact with other medicines that you may need as part of your treatment. Herbal medicines may help but you must ensure that they have no serious side effects and they do not interfere with your medical treatment.

Herbal medicines are not a quick fix, they take time to work. Many people expect instant results in their medicine which is unlikely in herbal medicine unless large doses are taken, which is not advised unless under supervision from a qualified practitioner. The action of herbal medicines is to support the body's own natural repair processes, they do not target the symptoms directly, and this is why they take longer to work than ‘normal’ medicines, but by supporting the body's natural processes a longer term improvement is believed to be had.

Herbal medicine takes a holistic approach to the body, and so a herbalist will look at the cause for the disease and not just the symptoms. In view of this two people could present with the same symptoms yet be given different medicines. People often choose their herbal medicine based on other people's recommendation that ‘this worked for me’. Although it may help, the cause of their disease may be different and so they may benefit from a different herb or a combination of herbs. It is important that you are properly advised when you buy any herbal medicines. It must also be noted that many of the over the counter herbal medicines you can buy are often lower doses than you would get from a herbalist. This is good in that it prevents overdosing but may make the positive effects take longer to be noticed.

This following should provide some level of guidance to help you choose a treatment. It has not been possible to list every possible remedy as there are so many.

**Please let your doctor know about any thing you are already taking as it may interfere with your treatment. Before starting any new complementary therapies please discuss this fully with your doctor before beforehand.**

**Sections 1** are specifically therapies that people with cancer may use (but are also used generally).

**Section 2** are more general therapies that may be used by other people as well as patients with cancer. You may have symptoms that can be relieved by these.

**Please note; if you are pregnant or breast feeding, then you should not take any complementary medicines without consulting your doctor or complementary therapist. This leaflet is aimed at adults and none of these remedies are suitable for children.**

## Section 1

Name <i>Latin name</i>	Reported Uses	How it works	Side Affects/Adverse effects	Do not take if you have any of these conditions	Risk-Benefit Assessment
<b>Aloe Vera</b>	Wound healing, Sunburn, antiseptic, can also soothe an irritable bowel if anthraquinones removed constipation.	Anti-inflammatory. Irritation of the large bowel for its laxative effect with anthraquinones	Allergic reactions. Damage to bowel lining if anthraquinones not removed and so can be over-stimulating. Anthraquinone containing substances should not be used long term.	Known allergy to garlic, onions and tulips. Intestinal obstruction, Kidney Disease, haemorrhoids.	Applying to skin has few risks so may be useful. Apply gel liberally to skin Little benefit over conventional treatment orally. If anthraquinones removed allergic reactions are the only risk
<b>Angelica</b> <i>(Angelica archangelica)</i>	Poor appetite, abdominal discomfort, flatulence. Expectorant helps promote cough to expel mucous.	Bitters stimulate the liver and help 'strengthen' the digestive tract	Can make you become more sensitive to sunlight.	High doses may interfere with anticoagulant therapy – warfarin etc.	Few risks unless pregnant or have high levels sun/UV light exposure. No risk in normal use as food
<b>Bilberry fruit</b> <i>(Vaccinium myrtillus)</i>	Anti-inflammatory to bowel, helps vision, protects blood vessels, anticoagulant.	Contains anthocyanins which are antioxidants decrease capillary permeability and so helps microcirculation - eyes.	Not known.	If take anticoagulants -warfarin	No serious known safety concerns, so you can try it, in conjunction with conventional treatment, perfectly safe to take as a food
<b>Cats Claw</b> <i>(Uncaria tomentosa)</i>	Anti-bacterial, Immune enhancing, Anti-viral, anti-oxidant	Cleanses the intestinal tract.	Indigestion, diarrhoea	Not known.	Very little evidence to support its use.

Name	Uses	How it works	Side Affects/Adverse effects	Do not take if you have any of these conditions	Risk-Benefit Assessment
<b>Coffee Enemas</b>	Destroying cancer cells.	Detoxifies the body by removing waste. Stimulates immune system.	Infection, Perforation of bowel.	Not known.	No scientific evidence to support its use. <b>Not recommended in cancer treatment as risk of serious side effects.</b>
<b>Cranberry (<i>Vaccinium oxycoccus</i>)</b>	Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) Cancer prevention.	Possibly stops bacteria sticking to the wall of the urinary tract. Makes urine more alkaline	None known.	With diabetes, consider how much sugar is in the juice.	Work best in prevention of UTI's rather than treatment. Need 300-400mg of extract or 150-600ml juice per day. May help prevent cancer along with other fruits and vegetables.
<b>Devils Claw (<i>Harpagophytum procumbens</i>)</b>	Rheumatic/arthritic pain relief, poor appetite, digestive problems. Regulates the heart, anti-arrhythmic.	Anti-inflammatory, Bitter components stimulate the digestive system	Gastrointestinal Symptoms.	Stomach or small bowel ulcers, gallstones. If taking any heart medicines	Few human studies for the heart benefits. Limited evidence for pain relief. Few benefits over orthodox pain relief treatments
<b>Echinacea (<i>Echinacea angustifolia/purpurea</i>)</b>	Enhance the immune function. Treating upper respiratory tract infections	Modulates the immune system. Increases natural killer cell levels	Allergic reactions, although low risk	Not to be used by patients on immuno-suppressive drugs	Works best if take as prevention, although evidence still limited
<b>Essaic</b>	Anti-cancer treatment.	Acts on the glands.	Diarrhoea.	Not known.	No evidence that it works at all

Name	Reported Uses	How it works	Side Affects/Adverse effects	Do not take if you have any of these conditions	Risk-Benefit Assessment
<b>Feverfew</b> <i>(Tanacetum parthenium)</i>	Prevention of Migraine, tinnitus. Treatment of inflammatory arthritis	Anti-inflammatory Works best at first signs of migraine, can worsen migraine if given too late	Allergy with contact with fresh leaves. Mild gastrointestinal symptoms	Not to be used if have allergy to compositae (ragweed)	Some evidence that may help prevent migraine
<b>Ginger</b> <i>(Zingiber officinale)</i>	Diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, travel sickness.. Pain relief	Anti-inflammatory Promotes saliva and stomach secretions.	Heartburn.	Peptic Ulcers, gallstones, reflux  Large amounts may interfere with cardiac, diabetes and anticoagulant therapies	Some evidence that it works for nausea so worth considering for nausea and vomiting. Ginger in food is not contraindicated in pregnancy
<b>Ginkgo biloba</b>	Poor memory, dizziness, tinnitus, headaches, dementia	Aids blood flow around the brain and around the heart  PAF-antagonist	Nausea, headache, gastrointestinal disturbance	Not to be used if taking anticoagulant or antiplatelet treatments, or aspirin	There is some positive evidence but it is limited
<b>Ginseng-Korean</b> <i>(Panax ginseng)</i>	Promote health and longevity. Cancer prevention. Increase energy levels	Alters immune system. Relaxes muscles. Stimulant.	Can be over stimulating, Insomnia, diarrhoea, increased libido, raised blood pressure	Don't take with coffee, alcohol or for longer than 6 weeks. Not to be taken in acute severe illness. If have severe asthma. hypertension	<b>May have serious side effects.</b> Take with extreme caution. Risk of side effects may outweigh the benefits
<b>Ginseng-Siberian</b> <i>(Eleutherococcus senticosus)</i>	Cancer, heart diseases, helps control stress, boosts vitality, improvements to appetite. Exposure	Stimulates immune system.  Acts on	Diarrhoea, dizziness, hypertension, insomnia.	See Korean ginseng, although not as stimulating	Treat with caution

	to radiation	adrenal cortex			
<b>Grapeseed</b>	Prevention of cancer and furring of arteries (atherosclerosis).	Reduces inflammation.	None.	None known.	One study in healthy subjects. Cannot be recommended as cancer prevention.
<b>Green Tea</b>	Prevention of cancer and tumour progression.	Anti-Bacterial, antioxidant, cholesterol lowering.	Insomnia, Diarrhoea, Vomiting, Nausea, Abdominal Pain.	Known allergy.	Not harmful so it is worth considering. No evidence that it will change the clinical course of a disease that is already there.
<b>Lavender Essential oil</b>	Insomnia, headaches, poor appetite, relaxation.	Reduces the electrical activity in the brain.	Nausea, vomiting, headaches and chills.	None known. Never ingest essential oils	Not recommended as a medicine. There are possible benefits to using this in pillows, as bath oil, in massage and as application in lotion.
<b>Melatonin</b>	Cancer treatment Insomnia (difficulty sleeping), jet lag.	Stimulates immune system, regulates hormone release, sedates.	Abdominal cramps, tiredness, dizziness, headache irritability.	Liver problems, auto-immune disease, brain or neurological problems.	<b>No evidence for use as a treatment for cancer.</b> May be worth considering along with chemo or radiotherapy. Does not appear to have any risks for jet-lag or insomnia so it may be worth trying.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Reported Uses</b>	<b>How it works</b>	<b>Side Affects/ Adverse effects</b>	<b>Do not take if you have any of these conditions</b>	<b>Risk-Benefit Assessment</b>
<b>Milkthistle</b> <i>(Silybum marianum)</i>	Liver disease/ damage.	Alters the structure of the liver so that toxins are unable to enter the liver cells. Reported to aid liver repair and so improve its function  Antioxidant	Diarrhoea.	None known.	May have small benefit on quality of life, but should not be used instead of other treatment. Let your doctor know if you are taking this as it may affect the results of blood tests making them appear better than they are. This may delay treatment.
<b>Mistletoe</b> <i>(Viscum album)</i>	Mild sedative Lowers blood pressure Reduces heart rate Immunostimulant	Relaxes smooth muscles  Cyto-toxic	Diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, high and low blood pressure, seizures, vomiting	The leaves are used and not the berries, the berries are highly toxic	Previously used as a cancer therapy by injection, little evidence that it helps. Not for self medication
<b>Phyto-estrogens</b>	Prevention of breast cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis.	Reduces oxidation of cells, inflammation and carcinogenic agents. Modifies oestrogenic activity	Increased wind.	There is no problem with phytoestrogens in the diet.	Few risks and may have potential benefits, so consider increasing this in diet. If you already have cancer, this will not cure it.
<b>Red Clover</b> <i>(Trifolium pratense)</i>	Cancer and chronic skin disease – eczema, psoriasis  Bronchitis	Contains phyto-oestrogens – oestrogen moderating activity	May cause hormone changes	May interfere with hormone therapies or any medication to thin your blood.	No proven benefits to taking this.
<b>Royal Jelly</b>	Cancer and heart disease prevention.	Antimicrobial and anti-tumour.	Allergic reactions.	Not known.	Not enough evidence to recommend.

Name	Reported Uses	How it works	Side Affects/Adverse effects	Do not take if you have any of these conditions	Risk-Benefit Assessment
<b>Shark Cartilage</b>	Cancer, arthritis.	Theoretically starves tumours of essential nutrients (based on the idea that sharks do not get cancer).	Liver infection	Liver disease.	<b>Do not use as a cure for cancer. There are serious safety concerns including liver inflammation.</b>
<b>Vitamin B12</b>	Cancer Prevention.		Toxic in very high doses, Nausea.	Not known.	Not recommended.

## Section 2 Therapies not targeting specifically cancer patients

Name	Reported Uses	How it works	Side affects/ Adverse effects	Do not take if you have any of these conditions	Risk-Benefit Assessment
<b>Co-enzyme Q12</b>	General tonic. Heart failure. Neurological Disorders, especially when associated with cholesterol lowering drug use	Prevents damage to cell from lack of oxygen.	Anorexia, nausea, diarrhoea, other gastrointestinal symptoms.	Known allergy.	Not enough evidence to recommend.
<b>Evening Primrose</b>	Skin, heart and rheumatoid conditions. Pre-menstrual syndrome	Contains gamma-linolenic acid, Alters the metabolism of fat in some individuals.	Gastro intestinal symptoms. Headaches.	Mania. Epilepsy.	No evidence that this works but appears to be safe to take.
<b>Hop</b> <i>(Humulus lupulus)</i>	Insomnia, restlessness, Indigestion.	Bitter components stimulate the digestive system Sedative.	Allergic dermatitis, respiratory allergy in whole plants	Depression.	A dried hops pillow may help sleep with no potential risks.
<b>St Johns Wort</b> <i>(Hypericum perforatum)</i>	Mild depression, low mood. Neuralgia , sciatica Antiviral	Anti-depressant.	Gastrointestinal symptoms, fatigue, photosensitising	If you are on anti-epileptic drugs, anti-depressants. Interaction with warfarin, indinavir, cyclosporin, digoxin, theophylline and oral contraceptives and many other drugs	May be used in mild to moderate depression but not in severe depression. Let your doctor know if you are taking this.

Recommended reading for more information:

'The Desktop Guide to Complementary and Alternative Medicine and evidence-based approach'; Edzard Ernst (Editor); 2001; pages 83-195; MOSBY, Harcourt Publishers Ltd; Edinburgh.

'Tyler's Honest Herbal'; Steven Forster & Varro E. Tyler. The Haworth Herbal Press. New York.

'Herbal Medicine' Simon Mills.

Disclaimer: The risks and benefits of complementary medicines are subject to on-going research ; the above chart is based on information currently available. The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust and Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust are therefore unable to endorse the complementary therapies listed and cannot accept liability for any errors or omissions in the information given or for its accuracy. Whilst advice should always be sought from your hospital consultant before starting or continuing the use of complementary medicines the final decision will always rest with the patient.