Complementary Approaches: Support Groups

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Intro and Background
Generally support groups can be defined as a meeting of people who are all in a similar situation to discuss information and receive emotional support. These individual support groups can also differ in structure, experience, and topic. Support groups are thought to help cancer patients in many different ways. They can help fulfill emotional needs, help patients manage side-effects, lessen pain, and reduce anxiety. 1 Researchers have reported that, by talking to a group people in the same situation, each individual is able to better understand the events that can be emotionally difficult. 2 Some believe this essential reduction of stress may help the immune system work more effectively against cancer cells. 3 Recently, cancer patients have shown growing interest in internet based support groups because it is convenient and anonymous. 4, 5 In order to find support groups please visit the **National Cancer Institute Support Group Database**.

Scientific Research
The evidence that support groups can help stop tumor progression or reoccurrence is contradictory and unable to give a definitive answer. One early report found that women with breast cancer experienced an improved survival rate when attending support groups. 6, 7 Another study was able to exhibit an increased survival time at five years and, to a lesser extent, at ten years. 8 Alternatively, other studies found no relationship between cancer patients attending support groups and increased survival time. 9, 10, 11 Despite the contradicting evidence on survival time, nearly all studies do show that patients gain a significant psychological benefit from attending support groups. 9, 2

Currently, there are **many** ongoing trials examing the impact of support groups, both in-person and via phone, on cancer patients. View trial information at the National Cancer Institute. For more information about clinical trials please visit our section on Finding Clinical Trials.

Please be sure to see our notice on complementary therapies. To better understand and evaluate the research described above, read our Introduction to Scientific Research.

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