

Complementary Approaches: Homeopathy

Printed from <https://www.cancerquest.org/patients/integrative-oncology/homeopathy> on 06/13/2026

homeopathy.jpg

Intro and Background

Homeopathic medicine was developed in 1796 by the German physician Samuel Hahnemann. While in good health, Dr. Hahnemann took malaria medicine and experienced symptoms similar to the disease it treated. From this experience he developed the theory that like cures like (or the Law of Similars) and that most ailments could be relieved by a remedy that produces similar symptoms. [1](#) This theory has existed since the times of ancient Greece and is still important to modern day homeopathic practice. Many of the homeopathic treatments used today come from natural sources such as plants, minerals, or animals (diseased tissues or secretions) [2](#) and are thought to help kick start the body's own natural defenses by administering solutions with very weak concentrations of the desired ingredient. [3](#) Even when there is not a single molecule of the desired ingredient present, homeopaths contend that the water retains healing information and capabilities. [4](#) Skeptics contend that any response is a result of the placebo effect because the treatment does not contain any of the intended component. [5](#)

Available as both prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines, homeopathic treatments are tailored to the individual patient based on lifestyle, symptoms, etc. [6](#) The intention of the treatments is to treat the whole disease, not just the symptoms. [7](#) Homeopathic treatments exist for a variety of illnesses, from muscle soreness to HIV. Because of the nature of the treatment, the ingredients in each remedy can vary widely from disease to disease and person to person. [4](#)

Scientific Research

Most of the research on homeopathy does not pertain to cancer treatment, instead investigating whether homeopathy fights colds, muscle aches, respiratory problems, etc. Several studies have found that homeopathic treatments have no effect on cancer cell growth *in vitro*. [8](#), [9](#) In contrast, other studies show that they do kill cancer cells. [10](#), [11](#), [12](#) In addition, some homeopathic treatments have been shown to counteract some unfavorable side effects of conventional cancer treatments. [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#)

Exactly how they work, however, remains unclear. [13](#) According to a study at MD Anderson, four homeopathic substances killed breast cancer cells by changing the levels of proteins that regulate the cell cycle, like Rb and p27, and activating cell death via caspase 7, a cell-killer protein. [11](#)

The same group at MD Anderson gave homeopathic medications to fifteen patients with brain tumors. Seven of these patients had a type of tumor called glioma, and six of these seven tumors regressed on treatment. [10](#) Another clinical study reported prolonged survival in cancer patients treated homeopathically, [17](#) though this finding was later disputed on several levels, primarily due to experimental bias in the original work. [18](#)

Others have evaluated the body of research on homeopathy. An Australian team concluded that there is no reliable evidence that homeopathy cures any disease, [19](#), [20](#) though a more comprehensive Swiss study concluded that the country's health insurance program should pay for homeopathic remedies--a recommendation it adopted. [11](#)

A number of clinical trials have investigated how well homeopathic drugs can reduce side effects associated with cancer and its treatments. Whether homeopathy itself can treat cancer is not being studied; it is being investigated as an "add-on" or complementary therapy. One completed, single-blind trial found that patients who received homeopathic treatment reported higher quality of life. [21](#) Two trials are currently underway. [22](#), [23](#)

For information about ongoing clinical trials involving homeopathy, please visit our section on [Finding Clinical Trials](#).

US Food and Administration Approval

There is not enough evidence that homeopathy fights cancer, and the FDA has not approved homeopathic drugs as cancer treatments. However, homeopathic drugs that fulfill certain requirements do not require FDA approval. [24](#) For complete details, see the [FDA's Compliance Policy Guidelines](#).

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](#).

- Toxicology. (2005) 24: 219-233 [PUBMED]
- 2 Thangapazham, Rajesh L et al. Effect of homeopathic treatment on gene expression in Copenhagen rat tumor tissues. Integrative Cancer Therapies. (2006) 5: 350-350 [PUBMED]
- 3 National Center for Homeopathy. What Are the Medicines Homeopathic.org Accessed 2 June 2010. [http://www.homeopathic.org/meds.htm]
- 4 ^{ab} Jonas WB, Kaptchuk TJ, Linde K. A critical overview of homeopathy. Ann Intern Med. (2003). 138(5); 393-9. [PUBMED]
- 5 Milazzo S., Russel N., Ernst E. Efficacy of homeopathic therapy in cancer treatment. Eur J Cancer. (2006) 42(3): 282-9 [PUBMED]
- 6 Committee on the Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by the American Public Board on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in the United States. The National Academies Press. 2005 Washington D.C. p.106
- 7 Jonas WB, Kaptchuk TJ, Linde K. A critical overview of homeopathy. Ann Intern Med. (2003). 138(5); 393-9. [PUBMED]
- 8 Jonas et al. Can homeopathic treatment slow prostate cancer growth? Integrative Cancer Therapies. (2006) 5: 343-349. [PUBMED]
- 9 Thangapazham, Rajesh L et al. Homeopathic medicines do not alter growth and gene expression in prostate cancer cells in vitro. Integrative Cancer Therapies. 92006) 5 356-361 [PUBMED]
- 10 ^{ab} Pathak S, Multani AS, Banerji P, Banerji P. Ruta 6 selectively induces cell death in brain cancer cells but proliferation in normal peripheral blood lymphocytes: A novel treatment for human brain cancer. Int J Oncol. 2003 Oct;23(4):975-82. [PUBMED]
- 11 ^{abc} Frenkel, M. Is There a Role for Homeopathy in Cancer Care? Questions and Challenges. Curr Oncol Rep. 2015 Sep;17(9):43. [PUBMED]
- 12 Frenkel M, Mishra BM, Sen S, Yang P, Pawlus A, Vence L, Leblanc A, Cohen L, Banerji P, Banerji P. Cytotoxic effects of ultra-diluted remedies on breast cancer cells. Int J Oncol. 2010 Feb;36(2):395-403. [PUBMED]
- 13 ^{ab} Thangapazham, Rajesh L et al. Effect of homeopathic treatment on gene expression in Copenhagen rat tumor tissues. Integrative Cancer Therapies. (2006) 5: 350- [PUBMED]
- 14 Oberbaum M. Experimental treatment of chemotherapy-induced stomatitis using a homeopathic complex preparation: a preliminary study. Biol Med (1998) 3(6): 1048.
- 15 Oberbaum M, Yaniv I, Ben-Gal Y, et al. A randomized, controlled clinical trial of the homeopathic medication TRAUMEEL S in the treatment of chemotherapy-induced stomatitis in children undergoing stem cell transplantation. Cancer (2001) 92(3): 68490 [PUBMED]
- 16 Balzarini A, Felisi E, Martini A, et al. Efficacy of homeopathic treatment of skin reactions during radiotherapy for breast cancer: a randomised, double-blind clinical trial. Brit Homeopath J (2000) 89(1): 812 [PUBMED]
- 17 Gaertner K, Müllner M, Friehs H, Schuster E, Marosi C, Muchitsch I, Frass M, Kaye AD. Additive homeopathy in cancer patients: Retrospective survival data from a homeopathic outpatient unit at the Medical University of Vienna. Complement Ther Med. 2014 Apr;22(2):320-32. [PUBMED]
- 18 Aust N. Prolonged lifetime by adjunct homeopathy in cancer patients-A case of immortal time bias. Complement Ther Med. 2016 Feb;24:80. [PUBMED]
- 19 Homeopathy: Regulation of Homeopathic Treatments. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. National Institute of Health. Accessed 25 June 2016. <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/homeopathy#hed6> [https://nccih.nih.gov/health/homeopathy#hed6]
- 20 Homeopathy: The Status of Homeopathy Research. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. National Institute of Health. Accessed 25 June 2016. <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/homeopathy#hed4> [https://nccih.nih.gov/health/homeopathy#hed4]
- 21 Frass M, Friehs H, Thallinger C, Sohal NK, Marosi C, Muchitsch I, Gaertner K, Gleiss A, Schuster E, Oberbaum M. Influence of adjunctive classical homeopathy on global health status and subjective wellbeing in cancer patients - A pragmatic randomized controlled trial. Complement Ther Med. 2015 Jun;23(3):309-17. Clinicaltrials.gov[NCT00861432].
- 22 Effect of Annona Muricata Leaves on Colorectal Cancer Patients and Colorectal Cancer Cells. 2015. Indonesia University. Clinicaltrials.gov[NCT02439580]. [https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT02439580?term=graviola&rank=1]
- 23 Frenkel, Moshe. Homeopathic Protocol for Advanced Breast Cancer. Meir Medical Center. 2015. Clinicaltrials.gov[NCT02190539]. [https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT02190539?term=homeopathy+cancer&rank=2]
- 24 Homeopathy: Regulation of Homeopathic Treatments. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. National Institute of Health. Accessed 25 June 2016. <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/homeopathy#hed6> [https://nccih.nih.gov/health/homeopathy#hed6]