

Cancer Treatment and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Both the diagnosis of cancer and its treatment can be devastating for a person. The fact that cancer has no single cause, but is instead a multi-factorial disease has confounded our attempts to find a single cure. Current treatment by surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy can cure or extend a person's life, but each has significant side-effects and risks.

Modern research on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM for short) is revealing that this ancient tradition has much to contribute in our search for ways to better treat and prevent cancer.

② Chinese Medicine and the Causes of Cancer

From TCM's perspective, there are three major contributing factors to the development of cancer.

The first two, external causes and a poor diet, are no strangers to Western researchers. External causes such as radiation, smoking or carcinogenic chemicals are considered by TCM to be forms of "toxins" that can invade our bodies and create tumors. A poor diet can impair our digestive system and create "Phlegm" that then hardens into tumors. Although Western Medicine doesn't make use of the metaphor of Phlegm, it too recognises the contribution of a poor diet to increased risks of certain cancers.

The third factor for TCM, chronic emotional stress, is a factor that tends to be overlooked by Western Medicine. According to TCM, emotional stress disrupts the smooth flow of Qi. Thus, long-term sadness, anger, frustration or other unresolved emotions can lead to the development of cancer.

② Chinese Medicine and Cancer Treatment

Much of the modern research on TCM and cancer has focussed on integrating TCM with chemotherapy or radiation therapy. This integrated approach makes use of Western Medicine's strength in attacking cancer, with TCM's strength of supporting the patient. One study treating 211 cases of lung cancer found that one year survival rates of people undergoing chemotherapy combined with herbal therapy was 85% compared to one year survival rates of 69% for people treated by chemotherapy alone.¹

Some studies exist on using TCM treatment by itself to treat advanced cases of cancer. While this is not the preferred approach of many practitioners, this research shows that TCM by itself can have an effect on cancer progression. A literature review of studies using a modern Chinese formula that also included Saw Palmetto, found that for 105 men with androgen-dependent metastatic prostate cancer, PSA levels (an indicator of prostate cancer activity) dropped by at least half for 90% of the patients. Unfortunately, this formula was not without side-effects similar to conventional prostate cancer treatments.²

In terms of prevention, diet and lifestyle has been shown to have a profound effect. For example, epidemiological studies of seniors living in Okinawa, Japan have shown that compared to North Americans, they have 80% fewer cases of breast and prostate cancer and less than half the rates of ovarian and colon cancer.³ Further studies on breast cancer have shown that Japanese women who move to the west and change lifestyle habits increase their risk of breast cancer. This illustrates how diet and lifestyle and not just genetics play a role in cancer rates.³



Preventative Tips from East and West

Both TCM and Western Medicine agree, avoiding exposure to cancer-causing agents such as inhaled smoke, radiation, many industrial chemicals as well as too much sunlight will lower your risk of cancer.

Similarly a wholesome diet rich in antioxidants and complex carbohydrates will help reduce your risks. A good diet, combined with regular exercise will also help you maintain an optimal weight – being overweight can increase your risks of hormone-dependent cancers.

Additionally, TCM points to chronic emotional stress as a contributing factor. Strive to come to terms with any unresolved issues that cause you anger, sadness, worry or frustration. Friends and trained therapists can provide you with guidance and support.

In the treatment of cancer, the integration of TCM and Western medicine makes use of the strengths of both Western Medicine's ability to attack cancer cells and TCM's ability to support the person as a whole.

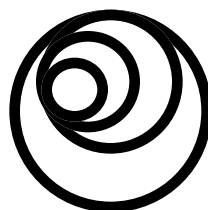
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 2. de Lemos, Mario. "Herbal supplement PC-Spes for prostate cancer". Ann Pharmacother. 2002. 36:921-6.
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Disclaimer

This factsheet is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information provided is not to be considered a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care practitioner.

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