

Cancer Survivors Are More Likely Than General Population to Use CAM, According to National Survey Analysis

A recent analysis of the 2007 National Health Interview Survey revealed that cancer survivors are more likely to use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) compared with the general population. According to the data published in the *Journal of Cancer Survivorship: Research and Practice*, cancer survivors are also more likely to use CAM based on a recommendation by their health care providers and to talk to their health care providers about their CAM use.

Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine investigated CAM use, reasons and motivations for use, and communication of CAM use with health care providers among 23,393 American adults—1,471 cancer survivors and 21,922 non-cancer controls. The researchers found that 65 percent of cancer survivors have used CAM in their lifetime, and 43 percent used CAM in the past year. In contrast, only 53 percent of the non-cancer respondents used CAM in their lifetime, and 37 percent used CAM in the past year. The most common reasons for which cancer survivors reported using CAM were wellness or general disease prevention (29 percent); enhancement of immune function (11 percent); energy enhancement (11 percent); pain management (6 percent); psychological distress (2 percent); and insomnia (1 percent). Cancer survivors were more likely than the control group to use CAM for wellness and general disease prevention, enhancing immune function, and pain management.

Cancer survivors cited various motivations for using CAM therapies; nearly 15 percent reported using CAM on the advice of a friend, family member, or coworker, while approximately 13 percent used CAM because of a recommendation from a health care provider. Fewer used CAM because conventional medical treatments did not help (5 percent) or because conventional treatments were too expensive (2 percent). Although cancer survivors were more likely than the control group to talk about CAM use with their providers, they disclosed less than a quarter of their CAM use to them.

The authors of the analysis noted that this is the first study that uses a population-based approach to examine the specific motivations of cancer survivors for using CAM therapies, as well as the degree of communication between cancer survivors and their health care providers. Although cancer survivors communicated more about their CAM use than the general population, the authors emphasized the overall need for improving communication between patients and providers about CAM use to help ensure coordinated care.

Reference

Mao JJ, Palmer CS, Healy KE, et al. [Complementary and alternative medicine use among cancer survivors: a population-based study.](#) *Journal of Cancer Survivorship: Research and Practice.* 2011;5(1):8–17.

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<http://nccam.nih.gov/research/results/spotlight/032011.htm>