

State of Scientific Research in Integrative Oncology

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Introduction:

Worldwide, Integrative Medicine is increasingly established. Large cohort studies have shown the beneficial effects of healthy diet (rich in fruits and vegetables, low consumption of meat and highly processed food) and physical exercise on cancer incidence. Single large prospective controlled trials demonstrate a reduced mortality after breast cancer with a low fat dietary pattern. Mind-body therapies like music therapy, meditation, stress management, and yoga are recommended for anxiety/stress reduction and for treating depression/mood disorders in practice guidelines for breast cancer patients. The guidelines conclude that there is a growing body of evidence supporting the use of integrative therapies, especially mind-body therapies, as effective supportive care strategies during breast cancer treatment. There is also growing evidence, that acupuncture is effective to reduce chemotherapy-related nausea and vasomotor symptoms in cancer patients. Vitamins and trace elements in general are not recommended in cancer treatment, Vitamin A, E and B6 might even increase mortality in some cancer entities.

In epidemiological and case control studies cancer patients often have reduced Vitamin D- and selenium-levels compared to controls. Placebo controlled studies have, however, up to now not convincingly shown benefit of Vitamin D or selenium supplementation regarding cancer mortality. Single Placebo controlled studies have shown efficacy of herbals for treating chemotherapy related side effects or improving quality of life (QoL) of cancer patients, e.g. ginger for treating chemotherapy related nausea; American ginseng for treating fatigue; mistletoe preparations for improving QoL. Differences in manufacturing, amount of active compounds and bioavailability hamper, however, the generalizability of studies with herbal preparations. Apart from clinical studies also well prepared case reports can contribute to document the effects of Integrative Medicine and mirror better than in clinical trials the individual approach to the patient.

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