

# About Integrative Medicine

A GUIDE TO SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT | FALL 2016



**Jun J. Mao, MD, MSCE**  
Chief, Integrative Medicine Service

## Welcome to the Fall Issue of *About Integrative Medicine*.

As we prepare to leave the warm, expansive days of summer behind and embrace the cooler and more introspective days of autumn, we explore the many ways in which integrative medicine plays an important role in symptom management for cancer care.

Here at MSK's Integrative Medicine Service we are dedicated to providing patients and their families with the highest quality evidence-based cancer care. Read on to learn about:

- How exercise can address fatigue
- How mind-body therapies can reduce anxiety
- Expansion of our Acupuncture for Neuropathy study
- The popular herb *Rhodiola rosea*

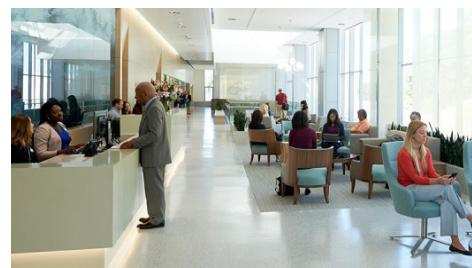
Each day we strive to help you manage common physical and emotional symptoms that often result from cancer treatments so that you can live your best life.

Enjoy this issue!

## Clinical Trial of Acupuncture Therapy for Peripheral Neuropathy Opens at Westchester

By Christina Seluzicki, Medical Writer

A clinical trial to evaluate the effectiveness of acupuncture for breast cancer patients who develop chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN) while on Paclitaxel (Taxol) is now underway at MSK Westchester. Our expansion beyond the Manhattan study site allows patients living outside of the city to participate in this important study.



Physician-scientist and principal investigator Dr. Ting Bao says, "It's a significant milestone for Integrative Medicine to get this trial up and running at MSK Westchester. We recently enrolled a patient who was previously unable to participate because it takes her 3 hours to drive into the city. Now, with our new site open, she was able to enroll and attend her chemotherapy and acupuncture visits at one location, without the added burden of a long and difficult commute."

CIPN is a challenging condition that may arise during treatment and cause symptoms such as numbness, "pins and needles" pain, and poor muscle coordination. Simple daily activities like opening a jar or buttoning a shirt can become difficult and patients must often either lower their dose or discontinue chemotherapy entirely.

Acupuncture, an integrative therapy available at MSK in which practitioners insert very thin needles at specific points on the skin to stimulate nerves, release endorphins, and increase blood flow, may reduce neuropathy symptoms and allow patients to complete chemotherapy as planned.

You may be eligible to participate in this study. **Learn more about the Acupuncture CIPN study by contacting the Integrative Medicine Service at 646-888-0811 or email [piulsonl@mskcc.org](mailto:piulsonl@mskcc.org).** ■

## Understanding and Coping with Cancer-Related Fatigue

By Donna Wilson, Clinical Fitness Specialist

Feeling tired is an expected part of everyday life. Keeping pace with competing responsibilities can wear us out and we expect a good night's sleep to solve the problem and restore our energy for the next day.

**Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is very different. This excessive whole-body tiredness can interfere dramatically with everyday life. Between 30–60% of cancer survivors live with CRF, making it the most commonly reported side effect.**

Frequently caused by chemotherapy, radiation, low blood counts, and certain medications, CRF symptoms vary and can last for 1–6 months or even longer. Fortunately, research has shown that physical activity and integrative therapies can help decrease CRF severity.

Because multiple factors can cause CRF, treatment interventions should be tailored to your specific needs. MSK's Integrative Medicine Service offers a variety of evidence-based, personalized support services known to be effective in decreasing this type of fatigue. In addition, see the next page for strategies that our IM physicians offer to avoid or treat CRF. ■

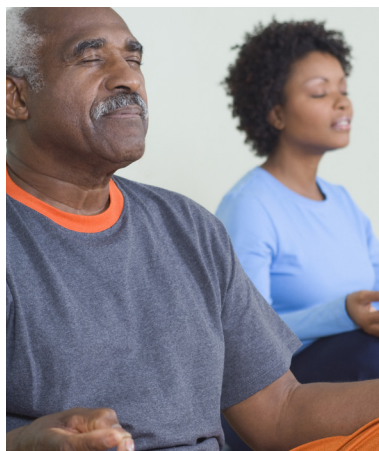
## Managing Anxiety with Mind-Body Practices

By Robin Hardbattle, L.Ac., Mind-Body Instructor

Anxiety is a natural response to the tremendous stresses that cancer patients, their families, and caregivers may experience at any point during their journey. We all feel anxiety in different ways: a racing mind, irritability, fear, an inability to sleep, or physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, palpitations, sweaty hands, and dizziness.

Depending on our own coping mechanisms, we may experience different levels of anxiety at various points in time. For instance, a patient or their caregiver may feel intensely worried immediately following a doctor's appointment or quite unexpectedly just while sitting at home. It's important to remember that you are not alone in feeling this way, and there are many services to help you to manage these feelings. Mind-body therapies like yoga, meditation, and tai chi may help.

Increasing evidence suggests that by incorporating mind-body activities into our daily routine, we can take control of stress and how it affects our bodies. Anxiety is not just an emotion; it is a response to physiological changes that occur when our autonomic nervous system is activated. In the short term, having our senses and body keyed up ready for a fight is great, if we are facing a physical threat. But when we go through the physical and emotional stress of cancer therapy, that same fight-or-flight mechanism remains activated for a long time, leaving us exhausted, stressed, and anxious.



Mind-body practices bring the autonomic nervous system back into balance by relying on the techniques of Mindfulness — focussing your attention on your experience of this very moment. If you have tried mindful meditation before but you feel frustrated by the process, understand that those feelings are normal; it takes time. Like most people, you probably have a running dialogue of thoughts and worries that feels almost impossible to turn off. This is part of everyday life. By joining a yoga class or listening to a guided meditation, you are making a commitment to explore living in the present moment. In time, you may find that your anxious thoughts and feelings will begin to soften and recede. ■

Integrative Medicine offers classes and self-care videos on yoga, tai chi, qi gong, and meditation to help you discover the practice that is right for you. For a copy of our current class schedule, go to [www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine).

## Herbal Highlight: Rhodiola rosea

By Jyothirmai Gubili, MS, AboutHerbs Editor

The MSK AboutHerbs database is a tool for patients and healthcare professionals to help determine the value of using common herbs and other dietary supplements. Here, we highlight Rhodiola rosea, a perennial plant prevalent in the Arctic regions of Europe and Asia.

Rhodiola has gained worldwide popularity as a dietary supplement over the last 2 decades. It has a long history of medicinal use to relieve stress, support immune function, and to improve strength and stamina. Clinical studies have shown that Rhodiola improves physical endurance, mental performance, and reduces stress-induced fatigue. It may also be useful for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) or mild-to-moderate depression.

Be sure to speak with your doctor before taking any herbal or dietary supplements. Although serious side effects have not been reported, Rhodiola may increase the effects — or side effects — of antidepressants, blood pressure drugs, or central nervous system-stimulating medications. ■



## Strategies to Avoid or Treat Cancer-Related Fatigue

By Donna Wilson, RN, MSN, CPT

1. Stay active! Long periods of immobility can cause loss of muscle mass and deconditioning, resulting in decreased energy levels. Our Integrative Medicine Service offers a variety of aerobic and resistance exercise classes to meet your needs.
2. Take one of our meditation classes, such as Return to Center or Meditation 101.
3. Receive acupuncture to treat symptom clusters such as depression, sleep disturbance, and anxiety, which can contribute to or worsen fatigue.
4. Join one of our weekly yoga or Tai Chi/Qi Gong classes.
5. Get a medical massage to reduce underlying causes of fatigue such as muscular tension, postural misalignment, and other painful conditions.
6. Remember that your nurse, doctor, and family members can play a pivotal role in getting you the help you need for this depleting symptom. Let them know if you are concerned about developing CRF.

Together, we can develop a personalized plan that meets your needs and restores your energy. ■

**Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center**  
1429 First Avenue at East 74th Street

Appointments: 646-888-0800

Visit [www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine](http://www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine) to receive our newsletter by email.