

About Integrative Medicine

A Guide to Self-Care and Support | Summer 2021

CHIEF'S NOTE



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

This July marks the one-year anniversary of Integrative Medicine at Home! As we take advantage of warmer weather, get outside to explore, and begin to safely reconnect with others this summer, we invite you to take us with you. With our membership program of virtual mind-body classes, you can stay active, centered, and strong no matter where you go. And you can feel safe knowing that we are a reliable source of information about integrative medicine cancer care.

In this issue, we discuss how integrative medicine can support adolescents and young adults navigating cancer treatment and survivorship; share our schedule for upcoming summer workshops and series; hear from herbal expert Dr. Yen Nien (Jason) Hou about herb-drug interactions; and discover flaxseed in our About Herbs feature. We also explore our current research in acupuncture for pain management with our wonderful patient partner, Ricardo Lopez-Torrijos.

Be well,
Jun

Navigating Change and Normalcy as an Adolescent or Young Adult with Cancer

by Lauren DeMarzo

In increasing numbers across the United States, adolescents and young adults are being directly impacted by cancer. During this life stage, people plan careers, pursue an education, and build social and family support systems, all while experiencing many physical and neurological changes.



*Nirupa Raghunathan, MD
Director of Pediatric Integrative Oncology*

“Universally, people in their teens through late thirties are in a phase of rapid and ongoing development, mentally, emotionally, and socially,” says Dr. Nirupa Raghunathan, MSK Director of Pediatric Integrative Oncology. “They are establishing their sense of self and vision for their future, and now we are seeing many young adults threatened with a life-altering illness: cancer.”

The Adolescent and Young Adult program at Memorial Sloan Kettering (AYA at MSK) is a coordinated multidisciplinary effort to care for the diverse and unique needs of younger people with cancer. “Trying to help young adults maintain a sense of normalcy during treatment despite rare circumstances is the inspiration for AYA at MSK,” says Dr. Raghunathan.

People diagnosed with cancer at a younger age can experience great fatigue, loss of energy, and reduction in muscle mass during and after treatments. The Integrative Medicine Service provides a specialized area of support for the AYA population at MSK. Integrative therapies including yoga, massage therapy, meditation, dance therapy, and fitness can help AYA patients maintain and recover physical functioning. For example, exercise, yoga, and massage therapy can serve to maintain flexibility and range of motion while also recruiting different muscle groups to compensate for changes in other areas of the body after surgery.





Clare Patterson, E-RYT is an MSK yoga instructor and AYA cancer survivor.

Young adults impacted by cancer can meet with Dr. Raghunathan to create their integrative care plan. **Call 646-888-0845 to schedule your first visit.**

AYA at MSK works with the primary care team and specialty services to support the unique needs of AYA patients through direct support and linking to resources, including our virtual activities, support groups, and education programs. **For more information, please contact AYAprogram@mskcc.org.**

Mind-body therapies, like meditation, music therapy, and dance therapy, also help teens and young adults cope with the trauma of their unique experience. “Receiving a cancer diagnosis as a young adult, in the prime of one’s life, can be a devastating and sometimes isolating event,” says Clare Patterson, an MSK yoga instructor and AYA cancer survivor. “Our movement workshops and community-building classes provide a safe environment where young adults can connect with others experiencing similar side effects and emotions.”

When meeting with younger people impacted by cancer, Dr. Raghunathan uses her expertise in non-pharmacologic therapies and young adult cancer care to discuss and implement a holistic approach to cancer care, survivorship, and overall health. “I focus on finding out more about a person’s habits in four key areas: diet, exercise, sleep, and stress,” says Dr. Raghunathan. “When I have a full picture of what may be going on, then I can make personalized recommendations to address one or more of those areas using a combination of natural therapies, like acupuncture and touch therapies for stress, or Integrative Medicine at Home so that they can work with instructors who have experience in cancer care.”



ABOUT HERBS FEATURE

Flaxseed

by Jyothirmal Gubili

An annual plant, flax has a long history of both commercial and medicinal use. Its seeds and oil are used in traditional medicine to treat constipation and urinary tract infections; to manage menopausal symptoms; and to treat coughs, colds, acne, and burns. Flaxseed is also promoted for complaints such as constipation and diarrhea as well as disorders of the heart and blood vessels.

Flaxseed is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids and lignans. It was shown to improve control of blood sugar levels in patients with type 2 diabetes, but the findings of its cholesterol-lowering effects are conflicting. Conclusive evidence is also lacking to support the use of flaxseed for relieving menopausal symptoms like hot flashes and night sweats.

In patients with prostate and breast cancers, flaxseed was found to reduce tumor biomarkers (molecules produced by cancer cells). But it was not effective for preventing oral infection following radiation therapy in patients with head and neck cancer. More research is needed. For more details about flaxseed, see our full article on the [About Herbs website](#).



Research in Pain Management: Exploring the OPTIMAL-HiChemo Study with Patient Partner Ricardo Lopez-Torrijos

by Jodi MacLeod



Jodi MacLeod is a patient advocate and cancer survivor who contributes to patient-centered outcomes research trials in Memorial Sloan Kettering's Integrative Medicine Service (MSK's IMS). She also serves as secretary of the Society for Integrative Oncology (SIO), and co-chair of the SIO Patient Advocate Committee.

On a recent Friday morning, I had the pleasure of speaking with Ricardo Lopez-Torrijos, a survivor of multiple myeloma and fellow patient partner in research in MSK's IMS. A scientist by profession, Mr. Lopez-Torrijos provides the patient perspective as part of MSK's research team for the OPTIMAL-HiChemo study. In this trial, lead researcher Dr. Gary Deng and his team are exploring if acupuncture can reduce the need for opioid medication in patients with pain undergoing stem cell transplants and high-dose chemotherapy. When Mr. Lopez-Torrijos read that the funding criteria for this trial included incorporating insights from patients, he was "all in."

Mr. Lopez-Torrijos had previously participated in a pilot study of acupuncture for pain in patients undergoing bone marrow transplant procedures at MSK, which serves as the basis for the larger OPTIMAL-HiChemo trial. "Going into a bone marrow transplant is very scary, and pain is one of the side effects," he recounted. "I don't like to take analgesics because I'm sensitive to their side effects, so I was open to acupuncture. Either I'm lucky, or I am a responder to acupuncture, because I didn't experience pain."



After a bone marrow transplant at MSK, Ricardo is living life to the fullest.

Beyond the acupuncture treatment, Mr. Lopez-Torrijos appreciated the efforts his care team made to communicate with him and with each other. These therapeutic alliances, including sharing Spanish as a native language with his oncologist, Dr. Sergio Giralto, a current co-investigator on OPTIMAL-HiChemo, provided a "healing connection." Receiving such person-centered care motivates him to help others as a patient partner. "It's very meaningful to know one's participation may have helped bring about better outcomes for other patients," he concluded.

Learn more about OPTIMAL-HiChemo and other current research at IMS [here](#).

You can read more about Mr. Lopez-Torrijos' story online in this [previously published post](#).

Upcoming Online Programming

JULY

- › **Workshop: Find Balance and Ease with Yoga, Breathwork, and Healing Sound**
Thursday, July 8, 1:00 PM to 2:15 PM
- › **Series: Mindful Self-Compassion**
Sunday, July 11, 7:00 PM to 8:15 PM
- › **Series: Barre Basics**
Tuesday, July 13, 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM
- › **Workshop: Martial Arts and Meditation for Functional Everyday Movement**
Tuesday, July 20, 6:30 PM to 7:45 PM

AUGUST

- › **Workshop: Osteoporosis: How to Build Bone with Exercise, Yoga, and Nutrition**
Thursday, August 5, 1:00 PM to 2:15 PM
- › **Workshop: Feeling Good! Reclaiming Your Body with Yoga and Dance**
Wednesday, August 11, 6:30 PM to 7:45 PM

SEPTEMBER

- › **Workshop: Integrative Health and Well-Being for Prostate Cancer**
Monday, September 20, 6:00 PM to 7:15 PM
- › **Workshop: Massage and Movement for Lymphatic Flow**
Monday, September 27, 7:00 PM to 8:15 PM



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

Integrative Medicine at Home Membership Program

Start your membership today online. Visit msk.org/athome to get started.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Monthly membership: **\$25**

Three-month membership: **\$60**

Six-month membership: **\$120**, plus one free workshop

AS A MEMBER, YOU CAN ENJOY:

- › Unlimited access to daily fitness and mind-body classes
- › Dedicated member resources website with on-demand videos to help keep you moving on your schedule
- › Discounts on our small-group workshops and mind-body series
- › Connecting with your cancer community
- › Staying active with guidance from MSK experts
- › Learning new skills to increase resilience and decrease stress

ASK THE EXPERT

Dr. Yen Nien (Jason) Hou on Herb-Drug Interactions



Dr. Yen Nien (Jason) Hou is a pharmacist, traditional Chinese medicine herbalist, and coordinator of the herb information center at MSK's Integrative Medicine Service.

His expertise is in the use of dietary supplements and botanical products. Because many people impacted by cancer use herbal supplements, there is an urgent need for reliable information on herb-drug interactions. Dr. Hou applies his expertise

to educate people with cancer and healthcare professionals about the proper use of herbs and supplements.

“What are some common interactions between herbal supplements and prescription medications?”

When taken together, certain herbs and/or dietary supplements can interfere with the way prescription drugs work in the body. It is important to understand these interactions to minimize the harms this can cause. Talk with your care team before taking any herbs or dietary supplements if you take prescription medications or if you are in active cancer treatment.

Some common herb-drug interactions are:

- › Leafy greens and warfarin (commonly used blood thinner): Overeating leafy greens, which are rich in vitamin K, can make warfarin less effective because it works by reversing the actions of this drug.
- › St. John's Wort and certain chemotherapy agents: This herb can make some chemo drugs such as imatinib less effective.
- › Minerals (calcium, magnesium, etc.) and certain antibiotics: Eating foods fortified with calcium or magnesium can make antibiotics such as doxycycline less effective.

“What are some common false claims about popular herbs?”

It is important to check the appropriateness of herbal supplement use with your healthcare provider. Do not rely on information you find on the Internet because there are few sources that are trustworthy.

- › **MYTH: Kratom is a safe, harmless therapy for pain relief:** Although this herb relieves pain, it comes with a high potential for abuse and serious side effects.
- › **MYTH: CBD and/or marijuana can even cure cancer:** Cannabis, including CBD and/or THC, can help with side effects, but there is no evidence for their use as cancer treatments. Cannabis can be psychologically addictive and may cause undesirable side effects.

MSK's About Herbs database is a tool that provides the public and healthcare professionals with evidence-based information on herbs, vitamins, and over-the-counter dietary supplements. You can learn more about About Herbs, including the About Herbs mobile app, [here](#).

To schedule a consultation with an Integrative Medicine doctor or nurse practitioner about using herbs and dietary supplements, please call 646-888-0845.

Do you have a question for our integrative medicine experts? Email us with “Ask the Expert” in the subject line at abouterbs@mskcc.org. We may feature your question in an upcoming issue!

