Complementary Medicine and Breast Cancer
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Abstract:

Complementary and alternative therapies are popular among the general public and cancer patients, in particular breast cancer patients. This report, which is based on the review of the literature, aims to investigate the biomedical and social contexts of complementary and alternative medicine use among women with breast cancer and how they seek, integrate and use complementary therapies.

Research suggests that a significant proportion of women with breast cancer use alternative medicine alongside conventional medical treatments. Their decision to use complementary therapies is influenced by their health care beliefs, side-effects of biomedical treatments, and the desire to maximise their positive health outcomes. Most commonly used therapies are dietary supplements, mind-body methods, manual/body-based techniques and support groups. Evidence-based research has demonstrated that mind-body techniques (psychosocial interventions, meditation and relaxation) and melatonin, a pineal hormone, may be effective in reducing stress, discomfort and side-effects from conventional therapies.

Some patients choose not to, or have limited opportunity to discuss complementary and alternative medicine with their clinicians, as the latter are dismissive of these treatments due to the perception that they are harmful or not-effective. In the absence of scientific evidence, clinicians are often reluctant to advise the patients to use alternative therapies.

This report suggests that the patient-oncologist interface may be improved by encouraging clinicians to recommend nutritional and lifestyle changes, such as mind-body techniques, that are supported by evidence-based findings.