

# Practical ideas to help breast cancer patients aid in their own healing and long-term survival

*Lessons from a two-time cancer survivor and integrative oncology author*

Unite for HER Speaker Series, Feb 2022

# Cancer forced me to look at my life and ask: “what can I do to help my body heal and prevent this from coming back?”

American Institute of Cancer Research quiz about risk factors for cancer (many types):

<b>BMI</b>		I was over the healthy range, overweight and right at the border of obese
<b>Activity</b>		I had no regular exercise prior to diagnosis
<b>Fruit and Veggies</b>		This was sporadic at best
<b>Whole Grains</b>		I preferred grains to white/processed, but was not strict about it
<b>High Fat/Sugar Food</b>		I was not aware of how much added sugar was in my food
<b>Sugary Drinks</b>		I was pretty good here, but added sweetener to my 4-5 cups of coffee daily
<b>Red Meat</b>		Never really liked and gave up years ago, so good here
<b>Processed Meat</b>		Pretty good here, but still ate some
<b>Alcohol</b>		Pretty good here, just socially with friends
<b>Sun Protection</b>		Pretty good here
<b>Smoking</b>		Good, never smoked

<https://www.aicr.org/cancer-health-check/Top>

This list became my roadmap to what I needed to do to change, coupled with an article I read about stress...

# The information I read about stress and managing it directly affected my choices during and after treatment



**Stress (traditional definition)\*:** a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation

Back in caveman times, the stress of **possibly being eaten** by a saber-toothed tiger sent the body into **'fight or flight'** mode (sympathetic nervous system)



Today, a myriad of stimuli can cause the same response, and our **always-connected**, constantly thinking about **"what's next"** society can also cause us to hang out in the stress response



The sympathetic nervous system response releases specific hormones (adrenaline, cortisol, norepinephrine) that **increase heart rate, elevate blood pressure, and increase blood sugar** (among other things)

\*<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stress>

# I kept one thing in mind: our bodies cannot 'Rest & Repair' when they are in 'Fight or Flight' mode

- So, while this evolutionary system of fight-or-flight **has helped us survive**, it is meant to be turned on only for **brief periods of time**
  - Prolonged exposure to stress and **extended fight-or-flight mode** is linked to **illness**, including **high blood pressure**, **negative mood**, **diabetes**, and there is emerging evidence that it may be linked to **cancer** cell re-activation



- The other nervous system response (parasympathetic) slows us down and releases acetylcholine, which **prioritizes blood flow** to internal organs and **reduces heart rate**. This aids in helping us **relax and heal**
- We also can use **methods** to slow ourselves down, quiet our minds – and put our bodies into 'Rest & Repair' mode
- The idea is to **manage stress** so we have **sustainability** in work and life, rather than live in stress and risk burnout



Stress Unchecked = **Burnout**

Stress Managed = **Sustainability**

# My research shows that broader awareness, access & funding of Integrative Oncology will improve cancer patient outcomes, including survival

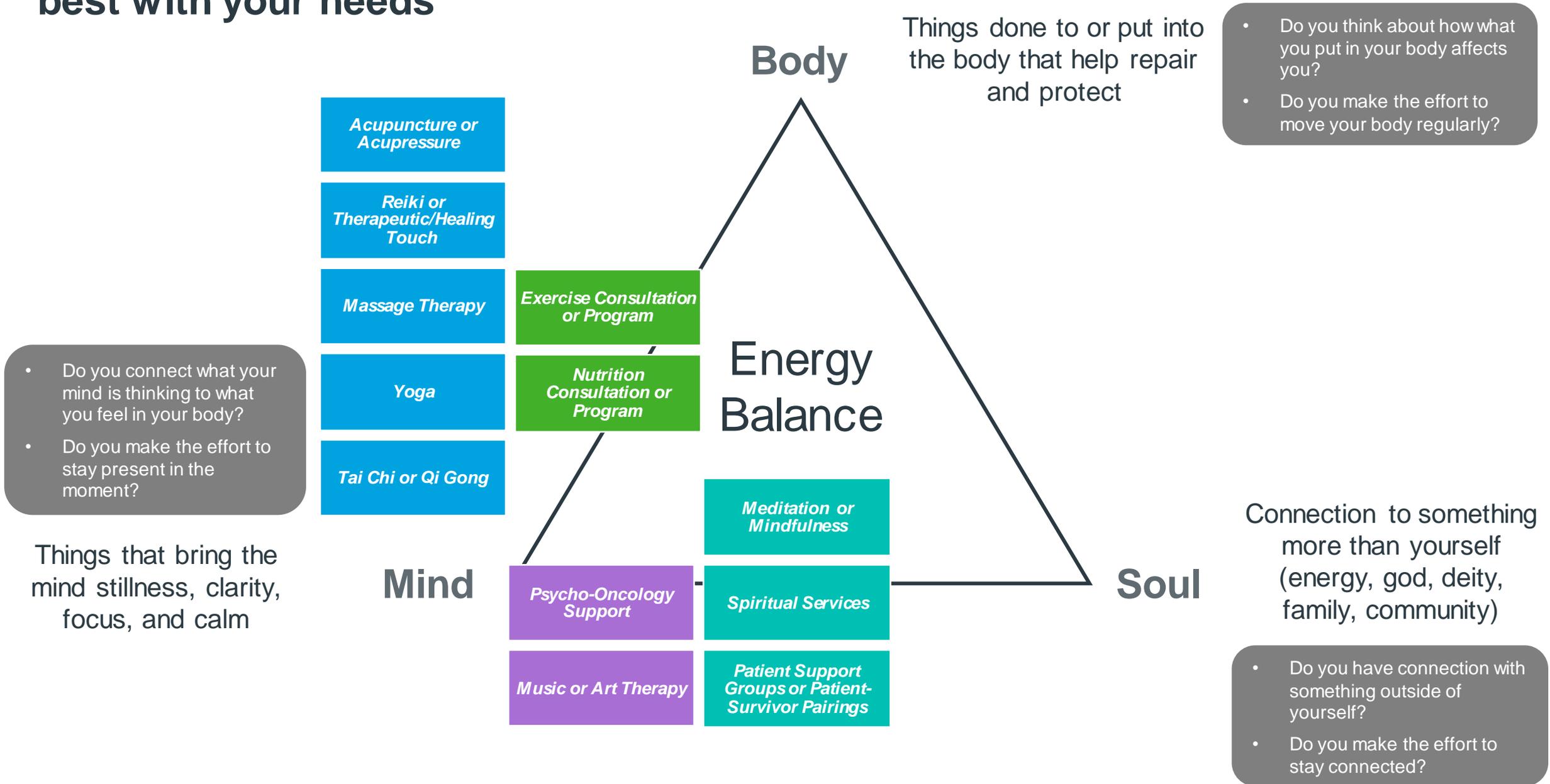
**Integrative Oncology Definition:** A patient-centered, evidence-informed field of cancer care that utilizes mind-body practices, natural products, and/or lifestyle modifications from different traditions alongside conventional cancer treatments



## Notes:

- Any individual patient is not expected to use all 12 of the Complementary and Lifestyle approaches listed; the idea of choice is important to allow patients to find the option(s) that works best for their needs
- The list of therapies is not exhaustive; it represents approaches used most commonly across journal articles (supplements addressed separately)

# Consider the therapies that align best with your needs



# “I really have no time – how do I work some wellness into my life?”

• Many of us cut back on commute time – can some of that be converted to self-care time?



• Try finding “bang for your buck” and get creative

- I get steps in while waiting at the bus stop for my daughter, or while in the room for the doc to come in
- Find meetings that are ones where you don't have to be at your computer, and go on a walking meeting
- My kids are a bit older, so now I use the time when they go to sports activities to do my own workout



• Put it on your calendar and make it a priority!

- I block a couple of half hours daily
- I have heard of CEOs who block a half day each week, or a couple of hours 2x/week



• Find the solutions that can be done in small chunks:

- Apps like Calm have 10-minute meditations you can do; when done regularly, there are huge benefits
- Stretch with mindful breathing in the morning for 15-20 minutes
- Get up from your desk and take 250 steps each hour (takes me about 3 minutes)



• Sit or walk out in the sun for 10 minutes a day



• Practice mindfulness during any and all activities



• Alleviate some stress by asking for help!



# “I have no money to invest – how do I work some wellness into my life?”



Walking is one of the most beneficial forms of exercise, and it is free and can be done nearly anywhere

- CNN article about walking (<https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/06/health/walking-benefits-exercise-wellness/index.html>)
- “But walking is so boring” – play a game (which house, find something blue, identify the tree or building), switch up your route, alternate music/audio book/talking to a friend/listening to nature

Veggies and fruit are usually less expensive at a Farmer’s market

- Or join a co-op or subscribe to “Hungry Harvest” (<https://hungryharvest.net/>)
  - They have organic or regular produce and various sizes to fit your needs
  - They also deliver it right to your door
  - It is easy to skip a delivery if you don’t need it that week
  - They also have great customer service
  - They do a lot for the community
- And, read labels to make mindful choices with <5g added sugar and less chemicals

Morning practice is free, mindfulness is free

Most of the things that feed our soul can be free with a little effort

- Surround yourself with people who are positive; consider distancing from the detractors
- Spend time with family and friends, living in the moment
- Practice your chosen religion/faith

Some employers have started working with insurance companies to offer financial help; check if your employer offers:

- Wellness programs for free (examples: nutrition/weight loss, yoga classes)
- Reimbursement for wellness items like gym memberships, wearable fitness devices, etc.

# The Benefits of Yoga

