

East Lancashire Prostate Cancer Support Group Newsletter



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Your health, your choices 'Alternative cancer therapies' may increase your risk of death

Behind the Headlines Wednesday August 16 2017

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There's no evidence alternative treatments alone cure cancer "Cancer patients who use alternative medicine more than twice as likely to die," is the stark message from The Independent.

Researchers found that people who chose alternative medicine instead of conventional cancer treatments were much less likely to survive for at least five years.

Conventional treatments included surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or hormone treatments. The research only applies to people who choose not to have conventional treatments.

Overall, 78% of people having conventional treatment for cancer survived at least five years, compared to only 55% of people having alternative treatment alone. The difference was biggest for breast cancer, where people who chose alternative therapies were more than five times as likely to die within five years as those who chose conventional treatments.

Because this is an observational study, we don't know if other factors might have affected people's survival chances, as well as treatment choice.

However, treatment choice seems the most likely explanation.

There are reports that some people find complementary treatments of benefit during cancer treatments. For example, some people have said that acupuncture helped them cope better with the side effects of chemotherapy.

But importantly, the emphasis is very much on the "complementary" and not on the "alternative". Ignoring medical advice on the treatment choices that potentially offer the most benefit could prove fatal.



Where did the story come from?

The study was carried out by researchers from Yale School of Medicine. No funding information was provided. Two of the four researchers had received previous grants from companies involved in conventional cancer treatments, and one received research funding from the organisation 21st Century Oncology.

The study was published in the peer-reviewed Journal of the National Cancer Institute as a "brief communication", meaning not all the study data was published. Some additional data is published online.

Most of the UK media ran reasonably accurate and balanced stories. Several – notably the Mail Online and The Sun – speculated on the types of alternative therapy people might have been using.

For example, the Mail said: "Breast cancer patients are 5.68 times more at risk if they opt for homeopathy." However, the researchers did not record the alternative therapies used, so we don't know whether homeopathy was one of them.

The Mail also refers to "herbs, botanicals, diets or energy crystals." While these are sometimes promoted as alternative treatments for cancer, again, we don't know which of them were used by people in this study.

What kind of research was this?

This was an observational case control study. This means researchers identified people with cancer who chose to use alternative therapies (cases) and compared their outcomes with those of people with cancer who chose conventional treatments (controls).

The controls were matched as far as possible with each case based on age, sex, demographics and type of cancer. Observational studies can show trends and links between factors (in this case between type of treatment and length of survival after cancer diagnosis) but cannot prove that one causes the other.

What did the research involve?

Researchers used data from the US National Cancer Database to identify patients with breast, lung, colorectal or prostate cancer, who opted not to receive conventional cancer therapies, but were recorded as having had "other-unproven cancer treatments administered by non-medical personnel."

These patients were matched with two patients with the same type of cancer, who were similar in other ways, but had opted for conventional treatment.

Researchers then looked to see how many people lived for at least five years, comparing those who chose alternative therapies with those who chose conventional cancer treatments.

Researchers only included people who had cancer that had not yet spread from the initial site. This type of cancer is usually treatable by conventional treatments. They also excluded people with stage 4 (advanced) cancer, those whose treatment was intended to be palliative rather than curative, and people whose treatment was unknown.

Researchers found 281 people who matched the criteria and who had opted for alternative therapy only. Of these, 280 were matched to 560 people with the same cancer, who chose conventional cancer treatments.

To minimise the effect of confounding factors researchers matched people in the study using

these criteria:

- Cancer type
- Age
- Stage of cancer
- Health insurance – in the US people with health insurance tend to receive a better standard of treatment
- Co-morbidities (other illnesses)
- Race
- Year of diagnosis

In addition, when calculating relative chances of surviving five years, the researchers adjusted their figures to account for the effects of medical and demographic factors.

What were the basic results?

Researchers found that people choosing alternative therapies were more likely to be younger, female, have fewer other ailments, a higher cancer stage, a higher income and education level.

Taking all types of cancer together:

- 78.3% of people having conventional cancer treatment lived at least five years (95% confidence interval [CI] 74.2% to 81.8%)
- 54.7% of people having alternative therapies lived at least five years (95% CI 47.5% to 61.3%)
- People were 2.5 times more likely to live for at least five years if they had conventional treatment (hazard ratio [HR] 2.5, 95% CI 1.88 to 3.27)

The type of cancer made a difference, though. This is probably because some cancers can kill quickly without treatment, and treatment is very effective.

We can see this in the breast cancer results:

- 86.6% of people who chose conventional treatment for breast cancer lived at least five years (95% CI 80.7% to 90.7%)
- 58.1% of people who chose alternative therapies for breast cancer lived at least five years (95% CI 46% to 68.5%)
- people were 5.68 times more likely to live at least five years if they had conventional treatment for breast cancer (HR 5.68, 95% CI 3.22 to 10.04)

However, for prostate cancer, it made little difference whether people opted for conventional treatment (91.5% lived for at least five years) or alternative treatment (86.2% lived for at least five years).

This is probably because prostate cancer usually grows very slowly in the early stages so few people die.

For the first five to 10 years, there's little difference in those who have conventional treatments and those who have their prostate cancer monitored, with no treatment unless it starts to grow. So, you would not expect to see a difference in a five year study.

How did the researchers interpret the results?

The researchers said: "We found that cancer patients who initially chose treatment with alternative medicine without conventional cancer treatment were more likely to die."

They added: "Improved communication between patients and caregivers, and greater scrutiny of use of alternative medicine for initial treatment of cancer is needed."

Conclusion

The results and conclusions of this study are clear: people who choose conventional treatments for cancer (such as surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone treatments) are likely to live longer than those who choose alternative medicine only.

It's rare for people to choose to ignore conventional treatment completely when faced with a cancer diagnosis. More often, people choose to add complementary therapies to their conventional cancer treatment. This study doesn't apply to people combining conventional and complementary therapies.

There are some limitations to the study to be aware of:

- As an observational study, it cannot prove that treatment choice (as opposed to other factors) was the sole reason that people who chose conventional treatments lived longer. However, it seems the most likely explanation. The researchers made efforts to balance out other possibly confounding factors. It's also clear from other studies that conventional cancer therapies do work.
- The study might have misclassified some people who started taking alternative therapies when diagnosed, but switched later to conventional treatments. However, as they would be classified in this study as having taken conventional treatments, this suggests that any switchers would only strengthen the study findings, if they were reclassified as having taken alternative medicine.

People who are diagnosed with cancer and want the best chance of surviving should choose conventional cancer therapies. These give the best chance of helping people with cancer to live longer lives.

Complementary therapies such as acupuncture and tai chi may help some people but they should never take the place of potentially life-saving treatments such as chemotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy.

Analysis by Bazian

Edited by NHS Choices

Links to the headlines Cancer patients who use alternative medicine more than twice as likely to die. *The Independent*, August 15 2017

Cancer patients who rely on herbs, homeopathy or energy crystals over conventional treatment are two-and-a-half times more likely to die within five years of diagnosis. *Mail Online*, August 15 2017

Cancer patients who shun chemo for alternative therapies 'are TWICE as likely to die'. *The Sun*, August 15 2017

Cancer warning: THIS treatment option could double your risk of dying. *Daily Express*, August 15 2017

Links to the science

Johnson SB, Park HS, Gross CP, Yu JB. Use of Alternative Medicine for Cancer and Its Impact on Survival. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Published online August 10 2017

Similarities between next-generation prostate cancer drugs discovered

Study highlights need for new treatment approaches

Date: June 22, 2017 Source: Cleveland Clinic

Cleveland Clinic researchers have shown for the first time how a class of advanced prostate cancer drugs are processed in the body and how their anti-tumor activity might change depending on how they are metabolized. Their pre-clinical findings, just published in *Cell Chemical Biology*, may lay the foundation for improving therapies for treatment-resistant, aggressive prostate cancer.

Next-generation anti-androgens are potent drugs that work by cutting off the prostate tumor's supply of androgens (male hormones), which fuel prostate cancer. The drugs, used in patients whose cancer has become resistant to hormone deprivation therapy, have been shown to improve survival in men with metastatic disease. Unfortunately, prostate tumors eventually become resistant to these drugs, highlighting the need for new therapies.

"Despite an array of improved treatment options that have become available over the past decade, prostate cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer mortality in men in the United States. There are few therapeutic options for men whose cancer has become resistant to all therapies," said Nima Sharifi, M.D., lead author on the study. "Our goal is to improve the use and role of these existing drugs and hopefully design new therapies that work better and longer."

Galeterone is a steroidal anti-androgen that was recently studied in a clinical trial. Dr. Sharifi's team in the Cleveland Clinic Lerner Research Institute's Department of Cancer Biology has shown that when galeterone is metabolized, it is converted to the intermediate molecule D4G, which blocks androgen synthesis and reduces the amount of androgens available to cancer cells. A pitfall is that galeterone is also converted to another molecule that may stimulate the tumor.

Dr. Sharifi previously found that another steroidal anti-androgen drug, abiraterone, is metabolized in a similar manner. He went on to show in landmark studies that abiraterone's metabolite D4A has greater anti-tumor activity than abiraterone alone and that other molecules stimulate tumor growth, suggesting that the drug should be fine-tuned to improve efficacy.

Dr. Sharifi's new findings suggest that effective steroidal anti-androgens share common metabolic activities and that their metabolites should be closely examined for their effects on tumor survival. The findings may also guide medical decision making in the use of steroidal vs. nonsteroidal drugs for advanced prostate cancer.

"New agents and a clearer understanding of drug mechanisms are both urgently required to improve outcomes for treatment-resistant advanced prostate cancer," said Dr. Sharifi. "This work provides an important foundation that hopefully will lead to better treatment strategies for this disease."

Story Source:

Materials provided by [Cleveland Clinic](#) [csrcswbewfuytfbwefzrbbbxzdaazry](#). Note: Content may be edited for style and length.

Journal Reference:

Mohammad Alyamani et al. **Steroidogenic Metabolism of Galeterone Reveals a Diversity of Biochemical Activities.** *Cell Chemical Biology*, June 2017 DOI: [10.1016/j.chembiol.2017.05.020](#)

“The Green Thing”

By James Marginson

Checking out at the supermarket, the young cashier suggested to the much older lady that she should bring her own grocery bags, because plastic bags are not good for the environment.

The woman apologized to the young girl and explained, "We didn't have this 'green thing' back in my earlier days."

The young clerk responded, "That's our problem today. Your generation did not care enough to save our environment for future generations."

The older lady said that she was right -- our generation didn't have the "green thing" in its day.

The older lady went on to explain:

Back then, we returned milk bottles, soda bottles and beer bottles to the store.

The store sent them back to the plant to be washed and sterilized and refilled, so it could use the same bottles over and over.

So they really were recycled. But we didn't have the "green thing" back in our day.

Grocery stores bagged our groceries in brown paper bags that we reused for numerous things.

Most memorable besides household garbage bags was the use of brown paper bags as book covers for our school books. This was to ensure that public property (the books provided for our use by the school) was not defaced by our scribbling. Then we were able to personalize our books on the brown paper bags. But, too bad we didn't do the "green thing" back then. We walked up stairs because we didn't have an escalator in every store and office building.

We walked to the grocery store and didn't climb into a 300-horsepower machine every time we had to go two blocks.

But she was right. We didn't have the "green thing" in our day.

Back then we washed the baby's nappies because we didn't have the throw away kind.

We dried clothes on a line, not in an energy-gobbling machine burning up 220 volts.

Wind and solar power really did dry our clothes back in our early days.

Kids got hand-me-down clothes from their brothers or sisters, not always brand-new clothing.

But that young lady is right; we didn't have the "green thing" back in our day.

Back then we had one TV, or radio, in the house - not a TV in every room. And the TV had a small screen the size of a handkerchief (remember them?), not a screen the size of the state of Montana.

In the kitchen we blended and stirred by hand because we didn't have electric machines to do everything for us.

When we packaged a fragile item to send in the mail, we used wadded up old newspapers to cushion it, not Styrofoam or plastic bubble wrap.

Back then, we didn't fire up an engine and burn gasoline just to cut the lawn.

We used a push mower that ran on human power.

We exercised by working so we didn't need to go to a health club to run on treadmills that operate on electricity.

But she's right; we didn't have the "green thing" back then.

We drank from a fountain when we were thirsty instead of using a cup or a plastic bottle every time we had a drink of water.

We refilled writing pens with ink instead of buying a new pen, and we replaced the razor blade in a razor instead of throwing away the whole razor just because the blade got dull. But we didn't have the "green thing" back then.

Back then, people took the tram or a bus and kids rode their bikes to school or walked instead of turning their mums into a 24-hour taxi service in the family's £30,000 SUV or van, which cost what a whole house did before the "green thing."

We had one electrical outlet in a room, not an entire bank of sockets to power a dozen appliances.

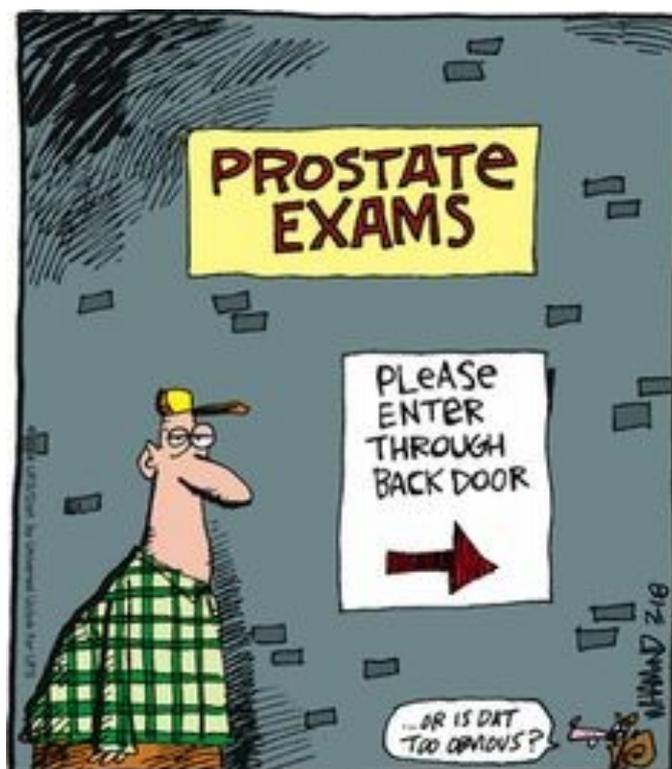
And we didn't need a computerized gadget to receive a signal beamed from satellites 23,000 miles out in space in order to find the nearest burger joint.

But isn't it sad the current generation laments how wasteful we old folks were just because we didn't have the "green thing" back then?

Please forward this on to another selfish old person who needs a lesson in conservation from a smart ass young person.

We don't like being old in the first place, so it doesn't take much to piss us off...

Especially from a pierced smartass who can't make change without the cash register telling them how much.





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From Left to Right Hazel Goulding (Treasurer) Leon D Wright (IT Admin) Stuart Marshall (Secretary) Steve Laird (Vice Chairman) Dave Riley (Chairman)

We are a group of local people who know about prostate cancer. We are a friendly organisation dedicated to offering support to men who have had or who are experiencing the effects of this potentially life threatening disease.

The East Lanc's Prostate Cancer Support Group offers a place for free exchange of information and help for local men and their supporters (family and friends) who may be affected by this increasingly common form of male cancer.

At each meeting we strive to be a happy, supportive and upbeat group of people; encouraging open discussion on what can be a very difficult and perhaps for some an

PSA Blood Testing Events 2017

Saturday 30th September

At Burnley FC

Turf Moor

10:00am

Saturday 28th October

At Blackburn Rovers

Ewood Park

10:00am

Suggested Donation to Cost of Test

£10

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