

Homoeopathic medicines have uncertain benefits in treatment of adverse effects of cancer treatments

Clinical question	How effective are homoeopathic medicines used to prevent or treat adverse effects of cancer treatments?
Bottom line	Compared with trolamine, calendula ointment reduced the incidence of acute dermatitis of grade two or above in women undergoing radiotherapy for breast cancer in 1 clinical trial (NNT* 5 [CI 3 to 11], 254 patients). There is no convincing evidence for the efficacy of other homoeopathic medicines for adverse symptoms and skin reactions related to radiotherapy. Two small studies were positive but both had an unclear risk of bias. Based on a single, small trial, 1 particular homoeopathic combination (Traumeel S - a proprietary complex homoeopathic medicine) showed promise in the treatment of chemotherapy-induced stomatitis. High quality trials to date provide no evidence for the efficacy of homoeopathic medicines over placebo in women with breast cancer suffering from menopausal symptoms. The homoeopathic medicines did not seem to cause any serious adverse effects or interact with conventional treatment. No cancer treatments were modified or stopped because of the homoeopathic interventions. *NNT = number needed to treat to benefit 1 individual
Caveat	It is difficult to draw firm conclusions because of the paucity of evidence, clinical heterogeneity and lack of repetition of the included trials. The calendula ointment used in the study was prepared according to the German Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia and so the results may not apply to topical preparations of calendula extracts prepared by different methods.
Context	Complementary therapies, including homoeopathic medicines, are used by many patients with cancer, usually alongside orthodox treatments. A systematic review of 26 surveys from 13 countries reported that up to 64% of patients with cancer (average 31.4%) used complementary therapies at some stage of their illness.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Kassab S et al. Homeopathic medicines for adverse effects of cancer treatments. Cochrane Reviews 2009, Issue 2. Article No. CD004845. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004845.pub2. This review contains 8 studies involving

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664 participants.

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[References]

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