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Cancer: Its symptoms and herbal treatment

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Abstract

Cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells anywhere in a body. These abnormal cells are termed cancer cells. In this paper, various types of cancer are mentioned. The symptoms of cancer are described. Different stages of cancer are thoroughly discussed. The main objective of the paper is to mention a wide variety of herbal treatments to cure cancer.

Keywords: Cancer, herbal treatment, symptoms

Introduction

Cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells anywhere in a body. These abnormal cells are termed cancer cells, malignant cells, or tumor cells. These cells can infiltrate normal body tissues. Many cancers and the abnormal cells that compose the cancer tissue are further identified by the name of the tissue that the abnormal cells originated from. Cancer is not confined to humans; animals and other living organisms can get cancer. Cancer cells can break away from this original mass of cells, travel through the blood and lymph systems, and lodge in other organs where they can again repeat the uncontrolled growth cycle. This process of cancer cells leaving an area and growing in another body area is termed metastatic spread or metastasis.

Types of cancer

There are over 200 types of cancer; far too numerous to include. However, the NCI lists several general categories. Some specific types of cancers found in each general category; it is not all inclusive and the cancers listed in quotes are the general names of some cancers:

- Carcinoma: Cancer that begins in the skin or in tissues that line or cover internal organs -- "skin, lung, colon, pancreatic, ovarian cancers," epithelial, squamous and basal cell carcinomas, melanomas, papillomas, and adenomas.
- Sarcoma: Cancer that begins in bone, cartilage, fat, muscle, blood vessels, or other connective or supportive tissue -- "bone, soft tissue cancers," osteosarcoma, synovial sarcoma, liposarcoma, angiosarcoma, rhabdosarcoma, and fibrosarcoma.
- Leukemia: Cancer that starts in blood-forming tissue such as the bone marrow and causes large numbers of abnormal blood cells to be produced and enter the blood -- "leukemia," lymphoblastic leukemias (ALL and CLL), myelogenous leukemias (AML and CML), T-cell leukemia, and hairy-cell leukemia.
- Lymphoma and myeloma: Cancers that begin in the cells of the immune system -- "lymphoma," T-cell lymphomas, B-cell lymphomas, Hodgkin lymphomas, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and lymphoproliferative lymphomas.
- Central nervous system cancers: Cancers that begin in the tissues of the brain and spinal cord -- "brain and spinal cord tumors," gliomas, meningiomas, pituitary adenomas, vestibularschwannomas, primary CNS lymphomas, and primitive neuroectodermal tumors.

Symptoms of cancer

Cancer gives most people no symptoms or signs that exclusively indicate the disease. Every symptom of cancer can be explained by a harmless condition. If certain symptoms occur or persist, a doctor should be seen for further evaluation. Some common symptoms that may occur with cancer are as follows:

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- **Persistent cough or blood-tinged saliva**
 - These symptoms usually represent simple infections such as bronchitis or sinusitis.
 - They could be symptoms of cancer of the lung, head, and neck. Anyone with a nagging cough that lasts more than a month or with blood in the mucus that is coughed up should see a doctor.
 - **A change in bowel habits**
 - Most changes in bowel habits are related to your diet and fluid intake.
 - Doctors sometimes see pencil-thin stools with colon cancer.
 - Occasionally, cancer exhibits continuous diarrhea.
 - Some people with cancer feel as if they need to have a bowel movement and still feel that way after they have had a bowel movement. If any of these abnormal bowel complaints last more than a few days, they require evaluation.
 - A significant change in bowel habits that cannot be easily explained by dietary changes needs to be evaluated.
 - **Blood in the stool**
 - A doctor always should investigate blood in your stool.
 - Hemorrhoids frequently cause rectal bleeding, but because hemorrhoids are so common, they may exist with cancer. Therefore, even when you have hemorrhoids, you should have a doctor examine your entire intestinal tract when you have blood in your bowel movements.
 - With some individuals, X-ray studies may be enough to clarify a diagnosis.
 - Colonoscopy is usually recommended. Routine colonoscopy, even without symptoms, is recommended once you are 50 years old.
 - Sometimes when the source of bleeding is entirely clear (for example, recurrent ulcers), these studies may not be needed.
 - **Unexplained anemia (low blood count)**
 - Anemia is a condition in which people have fewer than the expected number of red blood cells in their blood. Anemia should always be investigated.
 - There are many kinds of anemia, but blood loss almost always causes iron deficiency anemia. Unless there is an obvious source of ongoing blood loss, this anemia needs to be explained.
 - Many cancers can cause anemia, but bowel cancers most commonly cause iron deficiency anemia. Evaluation should include endoscopy or X-ray studies of your upper and lower intestinal tracts.
 - **Breast lump or breast discharge**
 - Most breast lumps are noncancerous tumors such as fibroadenomas or cysts. But all breast lumps need to be thoroughly investigated.
 - A negative mammogram result is not usually sufficient to evaluate a breast lump. Your doctor needs to determine the appropriate X-ray study which might include an MRI or an ultrasound of the breast.
 - Generally, diagnosis requires a needle aspiration or biopsy (a small tissue sample).
 - Discharge from a breast is common, but some forms of discharge may be signs of cancer. If discharge is bloody or from only one nipple, further evaluation is recommended.
 - Women are advised to conduct monthly breast self-examinations.
 - **Lumps in the testicles**
 - Most men (90%) with cancer of the testicle have a painless or uncomfortable lump on a testicle.
 - Some men have an enlarged testicle.
 - Other conditions, such as infections and swollen veins, can also cause changes in your testicles, but any lump should be evaluated.
 - Men are advised to conduct monthly testicular self-examinations.
 - **A change in urination**
 - Urinary symptoms can include frequent urination, small amounts of urine, and slow urine flow or a general change in bladder function.
 - These symptoms can be caused by urinary infections (usually in women) or, in men, by an enlarged prostate gland.
 1. Most men will suffer from harmless prostate enlargement as they age and will often have these urinary symptoms.
 2. These symptoms may also signal prostate cancer.
 3. Men experiencing urinary symptoms need further investigation, possibly including blood tests and a digital rectal exam. The PSA blood test, its indications, and interpretation of results should be discussed with your health-care provider.
- Stages of Cancer**
- There are a number of different staging methods used for cancers and the specific staging criteria varies among cancer types. According to the NCI, the common elements considered in most staging systems are as follows:
- Site of the primary tumor
 - Tumor size and number of tumors
 - Lymph node involvement (spread of cancer into lymph nodes)
 - Cell type and tumor grade (how closely the cancer cells resemble normal tissue cells)
 - The presence or absence of metastasis
- However, there are two main methods that form the basis for the more specific or individual cancer type staging. The TMN staging is used for most solid tumors while the Roman numeral or stage grouping method is used by some clinicians and researchers on almost all cancer types.
- The TNM system is based on the extent of the tumor (T), the extent of spread to the lymph nodes (N), and the presence of distant metastasis (M). A number is added to each letter to indicate the size or extent of the primary tumor and the extent of cancer spread (higher number means bigger tumor or more spread).
- The following is how the NCI describes the TNM staging system**
1. **Primary tumor (T)**
 - TX - Primary tumor cannot be evaluated
 - T0 - No evidence of primary tumor

- Tis - Carcinoma in situ (CIS; abnormal cells are present but have not spread to neighboring tissue; although not cancer, CIS may become cancer and is sometimes called pre-invasive cancer)
- T1, T2, T3, T4 - Size and/or extent of the primary tumor

2. Regional lymph nodes (N)

- NX - Regional lymph nodes cannot be evaluated
- N0 - No regional lymph node involvement
- N1, N2, N3 - Involvement of regional lymph nodes (number of lymph nodes and/or extent of spread)

3. Distant metastasis (M)

- MX - Distant metastasis cannot be evaluated (some clinicians do not ever use this designation)
- M0 - No distant metastasis
- M1 - Distant metastasis is present

Consequently, a person's cancer could be listed as T1N2M0, meaning it is a small tumor (T1), but has spread to some regional lymph nodes (N2), and has no distant metastasis (M0).

The Roman numeral or stage grouping method is described by the NCI as follows

Stage	Definition
Stage 0	Carcinoma in situ.
Stage I	Higher numbers indicate more extensive disease: Larger tumor size and/or spread of the cancer beyond the organ in which it first developed to nearby lymph nodes and/or organs adjacent to the location of the primary tumor
Stage II	
Stage III	
Stage IV	The cancer has spread to another organ(s).

As mentioned above, variations of these staging methods exist. For example, some cancer registries use surveillance, epidemiology, and end results program (SEER) termed summary staging. SEER groups cancer cases into five main categories:

- **In situ:** Abnormal cells are present only in the layer of cells in which they developed.
- **Localized:** Cancer is limited to the organ in which it began, without evidence of spread.
- **Regional:** Cancer has spread beyond the primary site to nearby lymph nodes or organs and tissues.
- **Distant:** Cancer has spread from the primary site to distant organs or distant lymph nodes.
- **Unknown:** There is not enough information to determine the stage.

Staging of cancer is important; it helps the physician to decide on the most effective therapeutic protocols, provides a basis for estimating the prognosis (outcome) for the patient, and provides a system to communicate the patient's condition to other health professionals that become involved with the patients' care.

Herbal treatment of cancer

Astragalus: A Chinese herb; an immune system booster, known to stimulate body's natural production of interferon. It also helps the immune system identify rogue cells. Work with the herb in both cancer and AIDS cases has been encouraging. The MD Anderson Cancer Centre in Texas conducted research showing that taking Astragalus when having Radiotherapy doubled survival times.

Berberis Family (e.g. Podophyllum peltatum): Slow active purgative. Research has shown these herbs to have a strong action against cancer and they have been used with many cancers, especially Ovarian cancer. In Cancer Watch March 2015, an ingredient Berberine, was shown in research to outperform brain cancer drug, Temozolomide in vitro. It was also shown to act synergistically with it and improve its efficacy.

Bloodroot (Sanguinaria canadensis): Research shows consistent anti-neoplastic activity. It has been shown to be effective against cancer tumours, and can shrink them; it is

one of the herbs in an anti-cancer poultice called Black Salve against breast and skin cancers; and has proven useful with sarcomas.

Butchers Broom (Ruscus aculeatus): The active ingredients of this herb has been found to be the ruscogenins which have tumour-shrinking and anti-oestrogenic abilities. Thus its use in the treatment of breast cancer.



Cat's Claw (Uncaria tomentosa): An adaptogen and powerful immuno-stimulant, it enhances the white cells clean up process (phagocytosis). It is an excellent companion to astragalus, curcumin and echinacea. Research indicates it can reduce tumour size, particularly with skin cancers. It also helps reduce the side-effects of chemo and radiotherapy.

Chaparral (Larrea mexicana): Cancer Watch covered a major research study from the US which heaped praise on this herb. It appears to boost the immune system, stop metastases and reduce tumour size. Seems especially interesting with breast cancer and is another ingredient in Black Salve. It is also an anti-oxidant and anti-microbial, with low toxicity.

Curcumin (Turmeric): This spice (Curcuma longa or Turmeric root) has been shown to have significant anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory activity. That alone seems enough for certain hospitals in America to consider using it in the treatment of polyps and colon cancer. However new research shows that it can both shrink cancer tumours and inhibit blood supply growth to tumours. It is a powerful antioxidant with liver protective benefits, and outperformed several anti-inflammatory drugs without side-effects in research.

Dang Shen Root (*Codonopsis pilosula*): increases both the white blood cell and red blood cell levels, so can be extremely helpful to patients having chemotherapy and radiotherapy, or to patients whose cancer diminishes levels of either.



Echinacea: Another known immune system booster, it gained a populist reputation in treating colds. There is research on its helpfulness with brain tumours apart from its abilities to increase the levels of certain immune white cells in the body.

Feverfew: This herb caused a storm when research from Rochester University in New York showed it to be more effective than the drug cytarabine in killing leukaemia cells. The US Food and Drug Agency put the active ingredient, parthenolide, on to its fast track programme. Nothing has yet been heard. But then, the FDA has never approved a herb for use as a cancer treatment.

Goldenseal: One cause of stomach cancer can be the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*. This burrows into the mucous lining of the stomach to hide from gastric acids, and then causes irritation, acid reflux, ulcers and even cancer. Goldenseal is generally anti-microbial and is used in the Caribbean and South East Asia against parasites. Goldenseal, helped by the mineral Bismuth, will kill *Helicobacter pylori*. Vets seem to know this, even if doctors don't. Berberine can be found in Goldenseal.

Milk Thistle: Known for years to be helpful in strengthening the liver, this herb has now been shown to be capable of protecting the liver during chemotherapy. Research in America showed that leukaemia patients who took milk thistle had reduced liver toxicity and chemo side-effects. There is a little evidence that it has its own anti-cancer activity too.

Pau D' Arco: This tree bark was original thought to be a strong anti-cancer agent, but then its actions were clarified as strongly anti-bacterial, anti-yeast and anti-microbial. That alone might be enough in some cases of cancer cause. But new research on the differing ingredients has shown the quinoids possess immune strengthening abilities and seem to help in cases of blood and lymph cancers.



Red Clover: Research from a number of cancer centres including the Royal Marsden has shown its potential as a part

of a treatment programme against oestrogen-driven cancers, from breast to prostate. One active ingredient in the so-called Herb of Hippocrates is the anti-oestrogen Genistein, which Professor Powles formerly of the Royal Marsden dubbed 'the anti-oestrogen'.

Sheep'S Sorrell: Used in Essiac and other herbal remedies, it is a cleanser and aids healthy tissue regeneration. There is some suggestion from research that it helps normalise damaged cells and tissue. It is also a highly praised 'vermifuge' - intestinal worms have little or no resistance to this herb.

Skullcap (*Scutellaria barbata*): Research has shown action against many cancer types, for example against cancers of the lung, stomach and intestines.

Sutherlandia (Cancer Bush): Peer reviewed research studies indicate that this herb is anti-inflammatory, anti-viral and anti-fungal. It boosts the immune system and inhibits Tumour Necrosis Factor, known to drive wasting in cancer patients.

Thorowax, or Hares Ear (*Bulpleurum scorzoneraefolium*): Research has shown its ability to enhance the production of natural interferon and it seems especially useful in bone cancer.

Wheatgrass: One of the top private hospitals in South East Asia extols the benefits of freshly juiced wheatgrass. One shot gives you the chlorophyll of some 12 or more kilograms of broccoli. It acts as a blood purifier, and liver and kidney cleansing agent. In research, after two weeks of daily use, blood and tissue oxygen levels improve, as does circulation.



Sweet Wormwood: Another Chinese Herb, this has outperformed certain anti-malaria drugs and is now used by the aid agencies. It is strongly anti-microbial and anti-yeast and can be used as an effective part of an anti-candida diet. Also certain cancer treatments cause excesses of yeasts to form (for example, in Leukemia treatment) threatening the patients health further. Excess yeasts are even felt by some cancer experts to be one of the causes of cancer.

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