

About Integrative Medicine

A GUIDE TO SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT | SUMMER 2020



Jun Mao, MD, MSCE
Chief, Integrative Medicine Service

CHIEF'S NOTE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, your home may have doubled as your child's school classroom, your home office, and a test kitchen. As a patient or caregiver, you may also now receive cancer support and take an active part in your wellbeing from home.

Integrative Medicine at Home is our new monthly membership program of live online healthy lifestyle classes. Developed and delivered by our team of integrative cancer care specialists, Integrative Medicine at Home offers 17 group classes each week. With classes starting this summer, we invite you to be one of the first members of this exciting new program. To learn more and register, call 646-888-0800 to speak with one of our care coordinators.

Also in this issue, read our interview with patient advocate Desirée Walker; talk with infectious disease specialist and director of Mind-Body Medicine, Dr. Shelly Latte-Naor, about the role of integrative medicine during COVID-19; practice neck and shoulder self-massage techniques for stress relief; and learn about arnica in the About Herbs feature.

Best wishes and be well,
Jun

Talking with Desirée Walker, Patient Advocate and Cancer Victor

By Lauren DeMarzo

Meet Desirée Walker, a two-time breast cancer survivor turned patient advocate. Through her work with organizations such as SHARE and the Witness Project of Harlem, Desirée educates Latinx and African American people in underserved communities about breast cancer screenings, treatment options, and how to take a proactive and integrative approach to their own wellness.

As a young woman, Desirée believed she was making many good choices to maintain her health. When she was diagnosed with stage I breast cancer at 38, Desirée realized she did not know enough about the disease and that other women of color may not either. "After I completed my radiation therapy, I felt it was important for me to go out and start to educate and empower people in the African American community. My hope is for the community to know about breast cancer risk reduction and the disease itself," says Desirée. "My ultimate goal was and still is to inform them to know their body and feel empowered to steward self, mind, body, and soul; to be comfortable to advocate for themselves; and not be afraid to ask questions of their healthcare providers."

At age 47, she was diagnosed for a second time, with stage II HER2-positive breast cancer. That's when she began advocating for legislation and resources for cancer prevention education for underserved communities and developed an interest in research advocacy.



Desirée Walker, patient advocate

"As a patient advocate, I feel I am making a difference and contributing to the person-centered care movement," says Desirée. "I strive to be one of the voices for the underserved communities in cancer care and the underrepresented groups in research."

During this same time Desirée's physical therapist recommended acupuncture for her neck pain and she was amazed by the results. But she acknowledges she would not have researched this option on her own.

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Three-Step Self-Massage Routine to Relieve Shoulder and Neck Tension

By Colleen Smith

Working from home during COVID-19? You may find that that your new workstation causes extra tension in your shoulders and neck. Try this self-massage routine to relax during your work day or whenever you're feeling stressed. Use enough pressure so that the sensation feels effective but not painful.

- 1 Bring your arm across your chest so that the palm of your hand rests on the space between your shoulder bone and the base of your neck. Squeeze in a slow, rhythmic motion for about 1 minute, as if you were kneading bread dough. Repeat 5 times on each side.



- 2 Where the back of your neck meets your skull, you will feel a boney ridge at the level of your ears. Make a fist with both hands and use your knuckles to massage the area directly below this boney ridge.



Use circular motions, starting from the outside and moving inward toward the middle of your neck. Repeat five times.

- 3 Cover the back of your neck with the palm of your right hand. Make sure your thumb is parallel with your other fingers. Gently squeeze your neck and turn your head to the left. Hold your head in this position for 15 seconds and breathe deeply. Move your head back to center and relax your hand. Repeat these steps five more times with your head turning to the left. Then, switch to use your left hand on the back of your neck and repeat these steps with your head turning to the right.



Upcoming Online Support Programs

Small Group Online Wellness Programs

Registration is required for the following groups. To register and for more information, please email mindful@mskcc.org or call 646-888-0800.

Tai Chi for Beginners

Fridays, July 10th to August 14th
3:00 PM TO 4:00 PM

Learn and practice tai chi at home with an experienced MSK mind-body therapist. Research has shown tai chi is helpful for strengthening muscles, improving circulation and balance, and reducing stress.

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation

Sundays, July 19th to August 23rd
7:00 PM TO 8:15 PM

Mindfulness is our ability to feel present and aware of our surroundings and our body. In six classes, an MSK mind-body therapist will help you work with your breath to bring more awareness to your daily life.

Yoga for Ease of Movement

Mondays, July 20th to August 24th
6:00 PM TO 7:00 PM

Discover the functional benefits of a gentle-paced vinyasa yoga practice. Learn how the breath can help you move with ease, reduce fatigue, and improve cardiovascular health with coaching from an MSK yoga instructor. You can participate in this class on a yoga mat or in a chair.

Calming the Mind During Stressful Times

Thursdays, August 6th to August 27th
7:00 PM TO 8:15 PM

Stressful global events can leave us feeling anxious. In this four-week series led by an MSK mind-body therapist you will practice meditation and mindfulness techniques to help manage worry, recurring thoughts, and restlessness.



ASK THE EXPERT

Dr. Shelly Latte-Naor on Integrative Medicine and COVID-19



Infectious disease specialist and MSK's director of Mind-Body Medicine Dr. Shelly Latte-Naor has been talking with many patients via telemedicine about their concerns related

to COVID-19. With so much still unknown, she says, "Using this moment in time to rethink our habits and stepping into new ones may be one of the most certain ways we can protect ourselves and our loved ones."

What role can integrative medicine play in the COVID-19 pandemic?

My patient and I lean into our computer screens, equally blurry in the frame of our telemedicine applications. The strangeness of the technology that both separates us and connects us takes time to get used to. The first moments of our telemedicine visit are spent acknowledging our strange new reality and appreciation that we are still able to connect.

In the past weeks, many of my patients have shared their experience of quarantine and isolation. Universally, one of the most common questions I receive is: What can I

do to protect myself from infection and severe disease? Many hope to hear about herbs and supplements that may shield them from the novel coronavirus and dampen the sense of helplessness and uncertainty this pandemic has brought. Yet, at this time, the answer to this question is still unknown.

Despite all that is not known about COVID-19, it is clear that lifestyle-related conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity increase the risk for more severe disease. Good lifestyle habits unfortunately don't guarantee health. But the risk-reducing behaviors of healthy nutrition, exercise, and sleep and stress-management including yoga, meditation, and tai chi can all be useful additions to your daily routine. The Integrative Medicine Service offers virtual programs and online resources to help you create new habits or reinvigorate practices that have helped you in the past.

To make a telemedicine appointment with Dr. Latte or one of our other Integrative Medicine doctors, call 646-888-0845.

Do you have a question for our integrative medicine experts? Email us with "Ask the Expert" in the subject line at bautherbs@mskcc.org. We may feature your question in an upcoming issue!

ABOUT HERBS

Arnica

By Jyothirmal Gubili

FEATURED HERB: Arnica

A perennial herb common in East Asia, Europe, the northern United States, and Canada, arnica has a long history of medicinal use. Topical formulations (those that are applied to the skin) are obtained from its flowers and roots, and continue to be popular today. They are used to treat bruises, sprains, arthritic pain, muscle aches, and acne. In a highly diluted form, arnica is



also used in homeopathic remedies to treat low-grade fevers, pain, and inflammation.

Preclinical studies indicate that arnica has antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects. Small clinical trials suggest that topical arnica is effective for osteoarthritic pain and skin bruising. Homeopathic formulations of arnica taken orally by mouth have also been reported to decrease postoperative swelling following knee surgery; to alleviate pain after removal of the tonsils; and to reduce bruising resulting from surgery to change the shape of the nose (rhinoplasty). Larger, well-designed trials are needed to confirm these findings.

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1, TALKING WITH DESIRÉE WALKER, PATIENT ADVOCATE AND CANCER VICTOR

"Most people of color do not know about acupuncture. We go with what we know rather than branching out to modalities that we have not heard of or used before." Furthermore, Desirée notes, "If there are no clinicians practicing in your community, then you have the added burden of travel, which leads to increased financial and time barriers, and that is taxing on individuals who may have to work more than one job or take care of a multigenerational household."

Through legislative and research advocacy, Desirée hopes to reduce and ultimately remove these barriers. She advises, "Be open and seek as much education as you can about the evidence-based options that exist for supporting your recovery."

Person-Centered Pain Management: Effective Integrative Approaches

In this lecture, integrative medicine specialist **Dr. Kevin Liou** will talk about research-based and effective integrative therapies that cancer survivors can use to address pain and improve their quality of life.

Tuesday, July 21, 2020
5:30 PM TO 7:00 PM

Registration is required. This meeting will take place online. To sign-up and for more information, call 646-888-8106 or email rlac@mskcc.org.

Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center
1429 First Avenue at East 74th Street

Appointments: 646-888-0800

www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine