

# How to Use a Blend of Herbs With Conventional Therapies to Treat Cancer

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The world of Western conventional medicine is oriented to the 'magic bullet' paradigm, where the search for drugs relies on the concept of compounds that bind specifically to a single target and demonstrate a high degree of potency. Recently, though, this approach has broadened, with researchers suggesting that it is *non-specific* and *relatively weak* patterns of activity that may ultimately prove of greatest importance in drug discovery. Though research on multi-targeted drugs is still at an early stage, studies indicate that certain antipsychotic drugs, for instance, appear to be more effective when several types of receptors are targeted.<sup>1-3</sup>

Traditional herbal medicine recognized centuries ago that combining many plants delivers far better results than relying on a single plant. This is true both for supporting health and vitality and for treating imbalances and diseases. The multi-component nature inherent in medicinal herbs makes them particularly suitable for managing the multitude of issues that present in complex diseases such as cancer, and offers great potential for synergistic actions, including interactions between botanicals and the relationship of botanicals to conventional cytotoxic drugs such as chemotherapy and targeted agents.

## The Origins of Herbal Medicines for Healing Cancer

Herbal medicine has been the foundation of treatment for human maladies since ancient times, and continues to be an essential

part of culturally based healing traditions in many cultures worldwide. As our respect for botanical medicine has grown, numerous herbs, including those traditionally used in Chinese medicine, are being incorporated as remedies for disease management and treatment in Western countries.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the following:

- 69% of anticancer drugs approved between the 1980s and 2002 are either natural products or have been developed based on knowledge gained from natural products.<sup>5</sup>
- About three quarters of plant-derived drugs in clinical use today came to the attention of pharmaceutical companies because of their use in traditional medicines.<sup>6</sup>

Because botanicals contain a variety of organic chemical complexes, they usually act on multiple targets. A potential advantage of phytochemicals is that they may act through multiple pathways, thus reducing the development of resistance by cancer cells.<sup>7</sup> Botanical medicine does not have single effects, nor does it have a high degree of potency, but rather is pleiotropic, having relatively weak (compared to that of drugs) or gentle effects, assisting rather than controlling, and often acting in an amphoteric, symphonic way—able to not only do different things in different situations, but even to have the opposite effect, depending on the circumstances.

Botanical, as well as natural dietary compounds, have drawn a great deal of attention as potential cancer preventive agents because of their wide margin of safety. However, single agent intervention has failed to bring the expected outcome in clinical trials; therefore, combinations of botanicals and natural dietary compounds are gaining increasing popularity.<sup>8</sup>

Botanical preparations include crude herbs, herbal tinctures, fluid extracts, powdered concentrated whole herb extracts,

standardized herbal extracts, and herbal isolates. Botanical compounds, even as isolates, differ from drugs in that rather than blocking pathways or receptors, they tend to “take the edge off” just enough to reduce excessive amplification. The result is that there is still plenty of activity for normal response and cellular activity. They are also capable of up-regulating protective pathways, targeting tumor cells, enhancing immune activity, and functioning as selective redox-antioxidants—inducing oxidative damage to cancer cells while protecting the health of normal cells. Botanical compounds also reduce mutagenicity of many of the main players in oncogene and tumor suppressor gene mutation, such as the p53 tumor suppressor gene.

### **Integrating Botanicals with Conventional Therapies In The Treatment Of Cancer**

Today, the tide is shifting in the way we view cancer, and as a result, in the ways cancer is treated, even with conventional drugs. The basis of using multi-drug therapy is the recognition that for each disease process, there is more than one mechanism and gene involved. For example, in pancreatic cancer, in the great majority of cell types there is a *global genomic analysis* that demonstrates at least 12 partially overlapping processes that are genetically altered. Even if you do find the “needle in the haystack” or a “driver” rather than a “passenger” in regard to the cancer, there are a multitude of “co-conspirators”, and the cancer intellect is continually mutating to gain an edge for strength, control, proliferation and metastasis. The pathways that are altered, both intra and extra cellular, as well as in the membrane in any individual tumor, vary widely. This has been documented in all cancers, and in particular Glioblastoma multiforme, which is the most common and lethal type of brain cancer.<sup>9</sup> This is why a multi-targeted approach is necessary and the basis for how botanicals can provide a significant advantage.

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