



## How Can Integrative Medicine Help With Fatigue?

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**Andrew Schorr:**

Hello and welcome to Patient Power. I'm Andrew Schorr. Integrative medicine, what does it mean? How can it help, particularly with a condition that many of us face, fatigue? Joining me now is an expert here in the department of integrative medicine at MD Anderson, Dr. Wenli Liu. Thank you for being with us.

**Dr. Liu:**

You're welcome. I'm glad to be here, honored to be here.

**Andrew Schorr:**

So, first of all, doctor, integrative medicine, not everybody understands what that means. How would you describe it?

**Dr. Liu:**

Integrative medicine is really evidence-based practice. We integrate current evidence into overall cancer care. Those are the cancer patients, either from the disease itself or from the treatment, have symptoms. Like you mentioned, fatigue is one of the very feared symptom of patients, and so we use current available evidence to incorporate patients' lifestyle changes as for managing their emotional stress, what they need to eat, supplements and physical activities. We incorporate the current evidence into the practice.

**Andrew Schorr:**

And then sometimes there are other approaches like acupuncture even...

**Dr. Liu:**

Yes.

**Andrew Schorr:**

...for pain management or could be meditation, all those kind of things. Let's talk about fatigue. So whether somebody is in treatment or living with cancer, they just feel tired, or the end of the day comes, or they feel they need naps or something like that. What are some strategies to help deal with that?

**Dr. Liu:**

For several reasons that can cause fatigue, and number one I would say to seek help, to first evaluate what is the cause of the fatigue. Make sure the first—some of the major causes such as heart failure, pulmonary failure can cause it, and you would seek the specialty management to correct those causes.

**Andrew Schorr:**

So it might not be your cancer.

**Dr. Liu:**

It might not be your cancer. It could be endocrine issues such as uncontrolled diabetes. Thyroid problems can be investigated and find out and connected, managed to help with fatigue. Once the etiology are identified or when it comes to ideology, we don't know exactly why, and that's when we come for integrative measures such as from diet standpoint of view, from physical activity standpoint of view, how well the patients sleep, how well the patients manage the symptoms of stress or depression can help managing the fatigue greatly.

**Andrew Schorr:**

So you have to look at the whole person. All right. So when somebody is living with fatigue, they know it's not normal for them. I would think it's important to speak up, tell your doctor or nurse, I used to be able to make it through the day with pretty good energy and now by 3 p.m. I'm hanging my head low. I just can't—it's tough to make it through the day. You got to speak up.

**Dr. Liu:**

Yes. Yes. Quite a few strategies can help, and overall we will balance how much you spend the energy or reserve the energy, and what is the most [sic] energy spender in a patient. So we do now, instead of one magnifier on cancer we do start to look more and more at the entire person.

We do ask the patients how overall they feel, what other symptoms they have. Are they able to sleep? And if they are not able to, what is the cause they are not able to sleep, trouble falling into sleep, trouble staying asleep? How long are their work hours? Do they have any work-related stress? Then we will design a particular intervention for a patient to manage the cause of their fatigue. If sleep is the issue, then we will be able to examine the sleep hygiene, examine their dietary habit, whether they exercise.

Acupuncture can be a great help to also help with insomnia, so the first step is to identify what is the cause of it.

**Andrew Schorr:**

You mentioned at the outset when you were talking about integrative medicine that it's evidence based, because there are a lot of things out there, whether it's on the Internet or your next-door neighbor, somebody saying take this, do this, you know, etc., but what your field is doing now is trying to document what works.

**Dr. Liu:**

Yes.

**Andrew Schorr:**

Okay.

**Dr. Liu:**

Yes. What happens in the laboratory study on a petri dish, what happens with animal study, we may not be able to directly translate to that result in human being, because we're a whole body, multi-organ system. We are not able to say because X, Y, Z things happened to a petri dish, and then we can directly apply to human being. Yes. Our evidence needs to be clinical evidence to directly be able to apply to our patients.

**Andrew Schorr:**

Okay. Well, this field of integrative medicine has certainly been growing.

**Dr. Liu:**

Yes.

**Andrew Schorr:**

And you're part of it, and one of the leaders of your department is Dr. Lorenzo Cohen, who is also interviewed on Patient Power. You can take a look at that.

The point is, you can bring this up. Is there a department, wherever you get treatment, or are there resources for integrative medicine? So with evidence you can design a plan that may help you with things like fatigue or other issues, the stress you may be dealing with, etc. Thank you for you all you do, Dr. Liu. Thank you for being with us on Patient Power.

**Dr. Liu:**

Thanks for having me.

**Andrew Schorr:**

Thank you. I'm Andrew Schorr. Remember, knowledge and getting the right assistance can be the best medicine of all.

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