



# Nature's remedies

Meagan Atcheson unpacks how nature's remedies can support cancer prevention and recovery.

Nature has long been a source of healing, and modern science continues to uncover the potential benefits of natural remedies in cancer prevention and recovery.

While conventional medical treatments, such as surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, remain the cornerstone of cancer care, certain natural compounds and lifestyle choices can complement these therapies and support overall well-being.

## The role of phytochemicals

Phytochemicals are bioactive compounds found in plants that have demonstrated cancer-preventative properties. Examples include polyphenols, flavonoids, carotenoids, and glucosinolates.

Green tea, for instance, is rich in epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), a compound with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Studies suggest that EGCG may inhibit cancer cell growth

and promote apoptosis (programmed cell death).

Cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli, kale, and Brussels sprouts, are other examples. These contain glucosinolates which when broken down form bioactive compounds, such as sulforaphane.

Sulforaphane has been shown to reduce inflammation, neutralise carcinogens, and inhibit tumour growth in laboratory studies. Including these vegetables in a daily diet may provide protective effects against certain cancers, such as colorectal-, breast-, and prostate cancer.

## The power of antioxidants

Oxidative stress, caused by an imbalance of free radicals and antioxidants in the body, can lead to DNA damage and cancer development. Natural antioxidants found in foods like berries, nuts, and dark leafy greens help counteract oxidative stress. Vitamin C, found in citrus fruits and bell peppers, and vitamin E, present in nuts and seeds, are particularly potent antioxidants. Including these nutrient-rich foods in your diet may help protect cells from damage and reduce cancer risk.





## Anti-inflammatory foods

Chronic inflammation is a key driver of cancer development and progression. Natural remedies that target inflammation include omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty fish like salmon and in plant-based sources like flaxseeds and walnuts. Turmeric, commonly used in Indian cuisine, contains curcumin, a compound with anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties. Incorporating turmeric into meals can be beneficial.

**Note: if you're on active cancer treatment for breast cancer, please consult with your oncologist before adding turmeric to your diet.**

Ginger is another anti-inflammatory powerhouse. Its active compounds, gingerols and shogaols, have been studied for their ability to suppress cancer cell growth and reduce treatment-related nausea. Regular consumption of ginger tea or adding fresh ginger to recipes can support both prevention and recovery.

## Medicinal mushrooms

Medicinal mushrooms, such as reishi, shiitake, and maitake, have gained attention for their immune-modulating properties. These mushrooms contain beta-glucans, which stimulate the immune system and may enhance the body's ability to target cancer cells.

Reishi mushrooms, in particular, have shown promise in reducing tumour growth and improving the quality of life for cancer patients. While more clinical research is needed, including these mushrooms in the diet may offer supportive benefits.



## Nature and mind-body connection

The natural environment can also play a role in cancer prevention and recovery. Spending time in green spaces has been linked to reduced stress, improved immune function, and better mental health outcomes.

Practices like forest bathing (immersing yourself in a natural environment) can lower cortisol levels and enhance the body's natural defence mechanisms. Similarly, sunlight exposure aids in vitamin D synthesis, which is associated with a reduced risk of several cancers, including colorectal and breast cancer.

## Limitations and precautions

While nature offers many remedies, it's essential to approach them with caution. Not all natural compounds are safe, especially when taken in high doses or alongside conventional cancer treatments. For example, certain supplements, such as high-dose antioxidants, can interfere with chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Always consult with an oncologist or registered dietitian before incorporating natural remedies into a cancer care plan.

Additionally, natural remedies shouldn't replace evidence-based medical treatments. They are best used as complementary therapies to enhance overall well-being and improve treatment outcomes.

## Practical tips for incorporating nature's remedies

- Diet:** Prioritise a diet rich in colourful fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds. Aim for a variety of colours to ensure a wide range of phytochemicals and nutrients.
- Herbs and spices:** Use anti-inflammatory herbs and spices like turmeric, ginger, and garlic in cooking.
- Lifestyle:** Spend time outdoors in green spaces and ensure adequate sun exposure for vitamin D synthesis, while practising safe sun habits.
- Consult professionals:** Work with healthcare providers to tailor natural remedies to your individual needs and treatment plan.

Nature's remedies offer a wealth of resources for supporting cancer prevention and recovery. By combining the best of natural and conventional medicine, you can optimise your health and improve your quality of life during and after cancer treatment.



MEET THE EXPERT

**Meagan Atcheson** is a registered dietitian who focuses specifically in oncology. She is a plant-centric foodie who promotes a nourishing approach to health and wellness using evidence-based research and guidelines only.