

# Heart

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## Threats

Many heart patients have a prescription to take aspirin, Coumadin (warfarin) or Plavix (clopidogrel), to thin their blood, prevent clotting, and reduce their risk of heart attack, stroke or other problems. But dietary supplements like ginkgo biloba, ginseng, garlic, vitamin E, fish oil or coenzyme Q10 can also cause blood-thinning (anticoagulant) effects, and doses aren't carefully studied and controlled like those for medicines. The total anti-clotting effect from taking both at once, or other interactions between drugs and supplements, are what worry experts.

Other complementary or alternative medicine (CAM) treatment approaches, from prayer, meditation and yoga to chiropractic and acupuncture sessions, do not pose a specific hazard when combined with conventional heart treatments. Many patients find them to be beneficial at reducing stress or increasing body function. They were also included in the U-M study.

The survey gave some surprising results. "Of the 146 patients surveyed, 74 percent reported using some sort of CAM therapy," says Kline-Rogers. "Sixty percent of the surveyed patients used supplements, vitamins or herbs, while 43 percent used mind-body or body techniques. Many patients used both."

Even when multivitamins and prayer, two widely used and accepted "alternative" approaches, were subtracted, 60 percent of all the patients used at least one remaining CAM technique.

Among all the patients who used CAM techniques, 31.8 per-

cent used at least one blood-thinning prescription medication and one diet supplement that could reduce clotting. This particular statistic troubles Kline-Rogers and her colleagues most. In the study they're now conducting, they're asking heart patients about their use of prescription medications and CAM techniques, their intake of beverages such as green tea and red wine that can also interfere with clotting, and their incidence of minor bleeding symptoms.

## Informing the doctor

The vast majority — 75 percent — of people who chose food supplements, vitamins or herbs told their doctor what they were taking. The rest said they didn't think it was necessary, or didn't care to discuss it, or that their doctor didn't ask. Kline-Rogers and her colleagues were pleased by the high percentage of those who told their doctors. But they note that both clinicians and patients need more education about the importance of talking to one another about CAM use, due to the potential risks of bad interactions between CAM techniques and conventional ones.

When asked about their greatest concerns about CAM techniques, a majority of CAM users said they were worried their chosen approaches wouldn't work, or were a waste of money. On average, using prices from local stores and practitioners, patients spent about \$10 a month on dietary CAM approaches, and \$98 a month on body-based or mind-body approaches performed by practitioners such as chiropractors, acupuncturists, Reiki masters and yoga instructors.

# Center

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brain," Weissman said. "We try to address the five parts of the whole self: thinking self, the creative self, the physical, loving and spiritual self. Unless you can address all, you've missed the boat."

The Reflection Spa, which Weissman said is the soul of the building, addresses patients who respond best with their soul brains. The spa serves as a calming refuge to patients.

Sculpture and artwork depict the stages and complex emotions of the soul's journey, from wholeness, to loss and sorrow, to redemption, and a return to wholeness.

In the center of the spa, a still reflection pool reminds those who gaze into it that whatever else is raging in their lives around them, there is a place of serenity in the center. A single drop of water disturbs the perfect calm in the pool, a reminder that even in the midst of peace, there is always change.

The spa serves as a place for patients to meditate, relax or just sit. "Some people just come in and read the paper," Weissman said.

Every week the spa, with its heated tile floor, is the site for yoga classes, music therapy and support groups.

The offerings at the center are so unique, Providence developed a monthly program known as Boost Camp. The camp is an all-day introduction to everything the center offers and is open to all cancer patients, whether they are being treated at Providence or not.

"It's kind of like our own version of a Whitman Sampler," said Weissman. "Patients come in and we give them an empty wooden toolbox. Throughout the day they are introduced to nutrition therapy and meditation and massage therapy. And everywhere they go, we give them something to put in the box. They are the 'tools' for survival."

Although Weissman and the center's staff know the camp and the center's programs



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DANKLES

**Working hard:** Amanda Shoupe works of the figure of a cat. Besides her extensive works in clay, Amanda paints and uses mixed-media.

help patients and families, Weissman said the program needs more statistical credibility. So Providence sought, and was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the National Institute of Health to conduct studies and collect empirical data on the program's effectiveness.

"This is the largest grant we have ever won, and it gives this center a lot of credibility. A lot of doctors are still hesitant to recommend massage or meditation for their

patients," Weissman said. "But we're looking to do the research and to meet the same standards as other evidence-based medicine. We want our programs to be evidence-based as well so they need to meet the same rigorous standards."

For more information about the Providence Cancer Institute in Novi and in Southfield, call (800) 424-0801, or visit Providence's Web site at [www.providence-hospital.org](http://www.providence-hospital.org).

# Marshall

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in my folder.

I learned to speak up, live in the moment, take a few risks, collect kisses along the way, and always remember that what makes time on Earth so precious is that none of us gets out of here alive, so I had better learn to live.

A lot has changed since then. I sold my skis. The kisses that keep me going are from a gorgeous 4-year-old, the son I didn't think I'd have.

And today, my surgeon's philosophy may not be so uncommon. I would be able to find a

network of support, as I learned at the Center. I could throw pottery. I could attend yoga and nutrition classes, and find support groups. There are a host of options and opportunities and help for people who want them.

Success isn't always measured in months or years or survival or death. The process is as important as the results. Still, my trip to wholeness was a success. I prove it every time my wee one asks me to pick up that old guitar and play the Sweet Baby James song.

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