



## Medical Marijuana and Cancer

Marijuana is classified in federal law as a schedule 1 substance under the Controlled Substance Act. Governor Tom Wolfe signed the Pennsylvania Medical Marijuana Act in to law in April 2016. The Pennsylvania Department of Health continues to implement the State's Medical Marijuana program.

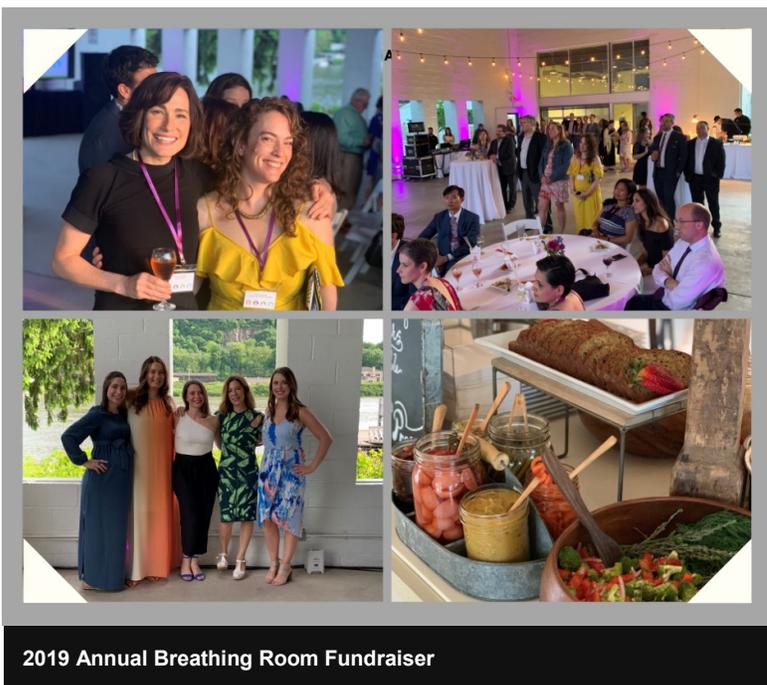
Medical Marijuana refers to regulated and legalized use of marijuana as a whole, unprocessed plant or its basic extracted components for medical conditions and/or symptoms. Some studies show marijuana may be anti-inflammatory or limit cell growth although we don't yet understand if it actually decreases cancer growth. However, Medical Marijuana may help manage symptoms associated with cancer such as nausea or decreased appetite, anxiety or insomnia, fatigue and pain. For this reason, it may be an attractive option for those looking to take fewer medicines due to potential side effects.

Through the Wellness and Integrative Oncology Program, Dr. Francis offers medical marijuana certifications to established oncology patients who are interested in targeting cancer related symptoms with Medical Marijuana to compliment integrative therapies. Dr. Francis can help patients who are interested in using Medical Marijuana to limit other medications or have concerns about interactions with cancer medicines.

For more information about participating in the Wellness and Integrative Oncology Program and how Medical Marijuana may be incorporated for symptom management please visit our [website](#).

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2019 Annual Breathing Room Fundraiser

### 5th Annual Breathing Room

The 5th Annual Breathing Room fundraiser took place on Thursday, May 16, 2019 at Aspinwall Riverfront Park. It was a wonderful night celebrating life while looking towards the future. This year's event raised \$35,000 which will go towards integrative demonstrations for patients. Integrative demonstrations include, acupuncture, yoga, personal training, oncology massage and lifestyle nutrition.

In addition to our evening event, we held our first every *Move with Your Community Day* on Saturday, May 18, 2019. Six local fitness organizations held donation classes in which over \$2,000 was raised to go towards to patient services.

Follow the hashtag [#breathingroom](#) on Instagram to see more pictures! Thanks to all who attended and continue to support our program!

For More Information: [website](#) or [email](#)

Follow us on Instagram [@upmccancerwellness](#)



By Angela Zaccagnini, MS, RD, LDN  
Kayla Miller, BSN, RN

## Sugar: What You Need to Know

The typical American diet often includes consumption of a high levels of sugar: more than 126 grams per day on average, which is equivalent to three cans of soda. The majority of sugar intake is related to sweetened beverages and processed food, which are high in calories but low in nutrients essential for energy and feeling full and satisfied. Research is evaluating how sugar consumption and hyperglycemia directly relate to cancer risk and outcomes. The study designs, measures, and findings are too inconsistent to draw generalized conclusions at this point. We do know that excess sugar intake is related to obesity, metabolic syndrome, and diabetes, which are all major risk factors for cancer (Makarem et al., 2018).

Working as a dietitian in a cancer center I get asked a lot of questions, but the most common questions is: **Will sugar feed my cancer?**

For as often as I get the question, the answer never seems to get easier. I usually discuss how all cells, not just cancer cells, utilize glucose or sugar for energy. It is best to limit simple and added sugars and focus on complex carbohydrates with adequate fiber to promote good glucose control. However, it is a lot more complicated than that.

According to the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine, cancer cells utilize glucose for energy, however if glucose is depleted, all macronutrients can be used as fuel for both healthy and cancer cells.

As research continues, the link between sugar and cancer is more associated with insulin resistance – The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics did a good job explaining that this is caused by long-term, high blood sugar levels which can lead to obesity and other chronic diseases such as cancer. When foods that contain sugars are consumed, they are digested within the intestine and then absorbed into the bloodstream causing an elevation in blood sugars. This then triggers the pancreas to produce insulin which brings the blood sugars back down to a normal level. When simple sugars are consumed, this whole process happens very quickly which can lead to a “vicious cycle” of high and low blood sugars.

The best way to control blood sugars and high insulin production is by being mindful of portions and always balancing carbohydrate intake. This means pairing carbohydrates with a lean protein source or a healthy fat. Try to choose high-quality, complex carbohydrates and limit intake of simple and added sugars.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans states that added sugars are not in foods naturally, they are added, hence the name. Simple and added sugars are in products such as soda, candy, pastries, cakes, cereals, fruit juices, and ice cream. Some ingredients to look out for: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, trehalose, and turbinado sugar.

Artificial sweeteners are available for a lower calorie option but may not be the best choice in the long run. These include saccharin, aspartame, acesulfame potassium (Ace-K), and sucralose.

### **Bottom Line:**

While more research needs to be conducted, it is apparent that high blood sugars leads to high insulin production and possibly obesity. Both conditions can increase risk of developing cancer and other chronic diseases. It is also known that stress is a big factor to disease and infection, so avoid the unnecessary, inevitable anxiety – have the piece of chocolate cake occasionally but focus on increasing intake of complex carbohydrates such as fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

### **References**

- Dietary Guidelines for Americans. (2015-2020). Cut down on added sugars. Retrieved from [https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/resources/DGA\\_Cut-Down-On-Added-Sugars.pdf](https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/resources/DGA_Cut-Down-On-Added-Sugars.pdf).
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- Oncology Nutrition DPG. (2014). Sugar and cancer. Retrieved from <https://www.oncologynutrition.org/erfc/healthy-nutrition-now/sugar-and-cancer>.
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## Stonefruit Clafoutis Recipe

Adapted from *Sweet Laurel* cookbook by Laurel Gallucci & Claire Thomas

We love this recipe served for breakfast or dessert! It is low in sugar with only ¼ cup of maple syrup and contains coconut milk for fat and almond flour for protein. It incorporates fresh fruit, which is so delicious this time of year. Enjoy!

### Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons coconut oil, melted, plus more for greasing the pan
- 1 cup full-fat coconut milk
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/4 tsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 1/4 cups almond flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 large eggs
- 2 cups sliced fresh in-season fruit

### Directions:

- Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- Grease a 9-inch ovenproof skillet with coconut oil.
- Combine the coconut oil, coconut milk, maple syrup, vanilla, vinegar, flour, baking powder, salt, and eggs in a bowl and whisk until smooth. *Ingredients can also be combined in a blender and pulse until a batter forms.*
- Scatter the fruit across the skillet.
- Pour the batter over it.
- Bake for 50 to 55 minutes, until the clafoutis is puffed and golden brown.
- Serve the clafoutis hot with more fresh fruit.

*Note: This recipe can be made with any peak-of-season fruit, but we especially love it with cherries, plums, or figs.*





By Rebecca Brown, CPT, NASM  
Cancer Exercise Specialist  
Corrective Exercise Specialist

## Meet Rebecca

I am so excited to be included in the UPMC Hillman Cancer Center Wellness and Integrative Oncology Program as a Cancer Exercise Specialist.

Exercise has been proven to be beneficial to the cancer patient and survivor. Not only can it improve their quality of life (alleviating symptoms such as lack of appetite, physical and mental fatigue, muscle pain, depression, and insomnia), but it plays an invaluable role in helping them regain their strength (both mentally and physically) and dramatically improves postural implications that can arise after surgery.

Each patient coming into the Wellness Suite is unique. My job as a Cancer Exercise Specialist is to create a fitness program that is tailored to them and their cancer journey, and to help them relearn safe and proper movement, all while having patience and compassion for themselves and their bodies.

## Weekly Staff Yoga



Thursday 7:45am-8:15am

Friday 7:45am – 8:15am

Hillman 4th Floor Terrace  
(If rain proceed to Hillman  
Ground Floor Atrium)

Any staff that participates in at least 5 sessions receives 30 credits in Take a Healthy Step rewards. Must sign in with name and employee ID number and participate in the session's entirety to receive credit.

*Take a Healthy Step: We are committed to helping you achieve your best health. Rewards for participating in a wellness program are available to all qualified members of this plan. If you think you might be unable to meet a standard for a reward under this wellness program, you might qualify for an opportunity to earn the same reward by different means. Contact us at 1-855-395-8762, and we will work with you and your doctor to find a wellness program with the same reward that is right for you in light of your health status.*



By Kathy Pascoe, LMT  
Oncology Massage Therapist

## Meet Kathy

One of the most instinctive and natural responses to human pain is touch. The cancer journey is full of many challenges and pain. Offering massage therapy, counteracts the stress this causes in the life of a cancer patient.

As an oncology massage therapist, I am dedicated to creating a massage experience where people find rest, renewal, and rejuvenation for body, mind & spirit. The massage environment is a place of tranquility where peaceful music plays, the massage table is warm, the lighting is soft, and the aroma of essential oils

waft through the air. The health condition of each patient is taken into consideration and the session is modified to meet his/her specific need.

As a child, I learned the benefit of touch from the loving hands of my mother. When she was diagnosed with cancer, I learned how that same type of gentle touch benefitted her by easing the stress and discomfort she experienced. Those poignant life lessons serve as the motivation for the work that I do today.

I am available Thursdays and Fridays in the Wellness Suite to provide table massage, as well as rounding through the treatment areas providing hand and foot massage.

In addition to working at UPMC Hillman Center, I provide hand and foot massage to pediatric cancer patients at Children's Hospital.



Mindy Cavendish, BSN, RN  
Nurse Ambassador

# A Nurse Ambassador Story

Mindy Cavendish is a Nurse Ambassador and works in the treatment room on the second floor of Hillman Cancer Center. Each Nurse Ambassador is asked to summarize three or four patient interactions per year. Below is Mindy's account of an interaction with a 73 year old female patient with pancreatic cancer.

*"The first time I worked with her in the role of nurse ambassador was in relation to neuropathic pain to the balls of her feet; one of her chemotherapies had been placed on hold for over 6 months in relation to this. Since then, she has resumed this treatment. I, as well as several of the other nurse ambassadors, have been able to provide her with both hand and foot massages utilizing the AromaTouch essential oil to potentially help decrease this pain. She now reports it as more of a "tingling" than a pain, at a much lower intensity. This patient has, in addition, taken advantage of the Integrative Oncology service of acupuncture, as well as sees a massage therapist on her own. The patient reports continued improvement of the neuropathy, despite restarting the chemotherapy that may have been the culprit. The patient reports being able to cut her dose of Neurontin in half after use of these additional therapies."*



Dr. Lanie Francis  
Founder & Program Director

## [ A note from Dr. Francis ]

Its July and the sun is out! In Integrative Oncology, we're looking at the summer as an opportunity to practice what we preach and let go of some of our tendencies to GO, GO, GO.

It's a nice time to think about re-engaging with friends and family, take advantage of longer evenings and JUST BE. That's my plan!

Happy Summer!

Lanie