



**Penny Brohn UK**  
Living Well with Cancer

# Creative arts

Evidence-based information to help you self-manage your cancer experience



## About this booklet

**Creative arts** are treatments which involve using arts-based activities in a therapeutic environment, with the support of a trained professional. You don't need to have done these activities before, or have any particular skills or knowledge.

This evidence-based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about the range of creative arts activities on offer to support people with cancer. If you'd like more information on how to access the range of services Penny Brohn UK provides, please contact our **Helpline on 0303 3000 118**. We're able to provide our services free of charge, thanks to the charitable donations and voluntary contributions which fund our work.

### How to use this booklet

This sheet is split into sections to help you get the information you need to start exploring different creative arts. We've included information about cost and safety of these therapies as well as quotes from people who have tried the different activities.

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# About art therapy

Art therapy is a combination of art-making and psychological therapy. Art therapy aims to help people reflect on their thoughts and feelings. You don't need to be good at art, or have experience in it, to benefit from art therapy.

For people with cancer, research has shown that art therapy may be beneficial for coping, quality of life, anxiety and depression.

Modern art therapy is a mixture of art and psychology. It is a creative way of exploring, expressing and communicating thoughts and feelings. For some, this can be easier than putting things into words and can be a way of bringing about new understanding and decisions. The focus is not on artistic quality but on what comes out of the process of art-making.



## What happens in an art therapy session?

- Art therapy can take place in groups or individually with an art therapist. It may be offered as a one-off or on a regular basis.
- During the session, the therapist will provide art materials. There is no limit to what materials can be used. For example pencils, paints and pastels may be offered, magazines may be provided for collage or clay and other materials may be used for sculpture.
- Some therapists follow a structure and will give a theme to focus on for the session. Others may choose to let their clients decide on their own focus. Some therapists may offer inspiration to help their clients get started. Their job is not to teach artistic skills, but to help their clients to explore and express aspects of themselves or their life situation that are difficult to express in words.
- Towards the end of the session, art therapists will give clients the chance to discuss their finished piece of work and what it means to them. This includes anything they want to share about the thoughts and feelings they had whilst making it.

## What do people who have tried art therapy say?

Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences. They can provide information from a personal perspective, but can't tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone.

Qualitative research<sup>1-4</sup> shows people with cancer report benefits, including providing a distraction and improvements in pain and anxiety.

## What do people from Penny Brohn UK say about art therapy?

'Reflection has given me the strength to move forward.'

'It has been something to look forward to. A sense of satisfaction creating something each week. Encouraged me to join wider groups.'

'The sessions have been hugely enjoyable and have enabled me to be more positive and outgoing.'

'[Art therapy] has helped me get in touch with my feelings and to think about making changes in my life.'

### What is the evidence on art therapy?

A good quality systematic review<sup>5</sup> looked at the use of art therapy for the management of cancer symptoms in adults. This review concluded that art therapy is of most benefit for psychological issues such as quality of life, coping and strengthening of the 'self'. Further research<sup>6-7</sup> looked more broadly at creative interventions for cancer patients including art therapy, music therapy, drama and dance/movement therapy. The most consistent findings across the reviews were for improvements in anxiety<sup>6-8</sup>, depression<sup>6-8</sup> and quality of life<sup>6,7</sup>.

### Is it safe?

Art therapy has no reported serious side-effects. It is considered safe.

### How much does it cost?

Art therapy is sometimes offered through the NHS in hospitals, hospices and cancer centres for no or low cost.

Private therapists may offer individual sessions at a cost of between £25 and £65.

### Are there any legal issues?

All art therapists practising in the UK are now registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Only professionally trained art therapists are legally able to practise art therapy.

## About music therapy

Music therapy involves using a range of accessible musical instruments or listening to music in a relaxed state. This is led by a professionally trained therapist. No musical ability is needed to benefit from music therapy.

Music therapy aims to improve psychological and physical health through emotional expression, relaxation and support.

Music plays an important role in all cultures and was recognised as a healing tool for body and soul by the ancient Greek civilization. Modern music therapy has its roots in the mid 20th century.

Music therapy is distinct from something called music medicine. Music therapy involves a therapeutic process and engagement with a qualified music therapist. Music medicine involves listening to pre-recorded music offered by healthcare personnel. The distinction between these practices is not always clear, particularly in the research looking at the effectiveness of music interventions.

### What is the evidence on music therapy?

A growing body of research evidence is finding positive support for music therapy. The most consistent findings are for improvements in anxiety and pain before, during and after cancer treatment<sup>7-20</sup>.

### What happens in a music therapy session?

- Each music therapy session is unique, as therapists aim to respond to the needs of clients. The therapist aims to take into account your music tastes and cultural background. No previous musical abilities are needed or expected.
- Group sessions use a wide variety of accessible musical instruments for the spontaneous creation of music, using different rhythms or simple melody patterns. This allows people to express their emotions in a creative way.
- Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) is a specialised branch of music therapy, offered by therapists who have undergone additional training.
- GIM involves listening to specially created programmes of music in a deeply relaxed state. The music and instructions from the therapist help evoke symbols, feelings, images, insights or memories.
- After listening to the music, the therapist helps the client to make connections between the 'images' and the client's life. They explore their significance and potential meaning.

### Is it safe?

Music therapy is generally considered safe<sup>5</sup> when carried out by a professionally trained music therapist. The music should not exceed 85 decibels.

### How much does it cost?

Music therapy is often offered within NHS hospitals. Therapists also offer sessions privately at a cost of between £30 and £45, depending on the experience of the therapist.

### Are there any legal issues?

Only professionally trained music therapists from approved postgraduate courses are legally able to practise music therapy. All trained therapists are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).



### Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer

Cancer Research UK  
0808 800 4040  
[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

Macmillan Cancer Support  
0808 808 0000  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

NHS 111  
111  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### More information

NHS Evidence  
[www.evidence.nhs.uk](http://www.evidence.nhs.uk)

CAM Cancer  
[www.cam-cancer.org](http://www.cam-cancer.org)

### Contact us

Helpline: 0303 3000 118  
Weekdays 9.30am-5pm  
(24 hour answerphone)

Email: [helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk](mailto:helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk)

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### Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time for illustrative purposes, we make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

### Disclaimer

While we make every effort to use up to date and reliable sources, we can't accept liability for errors in the sources that we use and we can't guarantee to find all the information relevant to your enquiry or request. All responsibility for interpretation of and action upon that information rests with you. This information and advice is offered on the understanding that if you intend to support your treatment with complementary or alternative approaches, then it is advisable to consult your medical team to ensure that they have a complete understanding of your situation and the complementary or alternative approach that you are considering.

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