Mistletoe Therapy For Cancer Patients

Mistletoe has been used as a medicinal plant since ancient times. It was Rudolf Steiner who first suggested it for cancer treatment in the early 1920's. In the meantime, the use of mistletoe has increased enormously. Nowadays many cancer patients worldwide and particularly in Germany use mistletoe in some form - sometimes as the primary medicine and frequently in conjunction with other methods such as radiation, chemotherapy or surgery.

Seek advice from a qualified physician before replacing standard cancer therapy with mistletoe treatment.

What does mistletoe treatment involve? Mistletoe, a semi-parasitic plant, has been used for over 75 years to treat tumors and is one of the most widely used alternative cancer treatments in Europe. Mistletoe extract is usually administered by subcutaneous injections in the morning hours, ideally near the site of disease, three to seven times a week. Treatment duration can be several months to years.

How is mistletoe thought to treat cancer? Mistletoe extracts are used to stimulate the immune system and kill cancer cells. The active ingredients in mistletoe, viscotoxins and lectins, can kill cells by damaging cellular membranes, stopping protein synthesis and stimulating the immune system.

What has been proven about the benefit of mistletoe? The major effects of mistletoe as determined in laboratory and animal studies include stimulation of the immune system, induction of programmed cell death (apoptosis) and protection from potential carcinogens. Cancer Net, a branch of the National Cancer Institute reviewed more than sixteen human studies using mistletoe to treat cancer. Only a few studies reported statistically significant positive results. The positive results included reduced tumor size, increased survival, recovery of blood counts and improved quality of life. Mistletoe is not approved for use in the U.S. and will not be until further research has proven the efficacy of mistletoe in treating cancer.

What is the potential risk or harm of mistletoe? Pharmaceutical grade mistletoe extract has minimal side effects but allergic reactions have been reported. Symptoms included anaphylactic reactions, chills, fever, headache and irregular heart rate. Elevation in body temperature and wheal formation at the site of administration are considered signs of immune system stimulation and are part of the normal therapeutic process. Eating mistletoe is highly toxic, especially to infants and children. Patients on any type of monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor antidepressants should not take mistletoe because of a risk of tyramine crisis. This product should only be used under the supervision of a health care provider.

Iscador and Iscar

The most frequently used mistletoe treatment in the world is Iscador, which is distributed by the Weleda Group.

Use of Iscador®, an Extract of European Mistletoe (Viscum Album), in Cancer Treatment. (5/1/2001)

A major 30-year-long study with more than 35,000 participants reports that extract of mistletoe (Iscador®) greatly improves survival rate for a wide variety of cancers, including breast cancer. Study participants who augmented conventional therapy with mistletoe extract survived 40% longer compared with those who didn’t use the plant therapy.

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