

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Healthy eating during chemotherapy

**Jose van Mil with Christine Archer-Mackenzie**

Kyle Cathie Limited (2008)

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176 pages

RRP: \$29.95

'*Healthy eating during chemotherapy*' is a recipe book with meals purposely designed for people with cancer undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The author, Jose van Mil, is a cordon bleu trained chef who currently works as a food writer, stylist and culinary consultant. She was motivated to write the book following her experience of caring for her husband through his cancer treatment. She sought the advice and input from a scientist whose research has focused on cancer, its treatments and associated side-effects, particularly eating difficulties. The scientific advisor has also had an experience of caring for her husband through his cancer treatment.

The introduction to the book contains a personal reflection by the author on her experience following her husband's cancer diagnosis. She discusses her observations of watching not only her husband's dissociation with food as a consequence of treatment, but also the difficulties other patients were experiencing maintaining adequate nutrition. With the help of an oncology dietitian, the author devised some menu plans which she believes helped her husband to maintain his weight throughout chemotherapy, radiotherapy and stem cell transplantation. Her hope for the book is that it will inspire patients undergoing cancer treatment to keep eating, which she believes will aid their overall recovery.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the potential eating difficulties experienced by people undergoing cancer treatment. It also provides a clear and concise layperson description of the definition of cancer, the usual treatments and the most common side-effects. This section contains information on what food types to

avoid during treatment (the sort of foods most people are recommended to avoid, processed and refined).

Part two contains over 100 recipes, divided into six chapters according to the texture of the food. There is a section of liquid dishes, moving through to dishes with a smooth texture, building up to recipes with a crisp and finally, firm consistency. Within the chapters, the meals are divided according to temperature, flavour and portion size. Before production of the book the recipes were tested and approved by patients undergoing cancer treatment.

I think the concept of the book is excellent and among the first of its kind. I also believe it provides helpful food creation ideas for carers and friends of people undergoing cancer treatment. However, some of the recipes might require an acquired taste. Take, for example, 'whipped tuna with orange juice', a concoction of tinned tuna, orange juice, mayonnaise, soya yogurt and soya cream whipped together and served as a mousse! There are however, many useful recipes, including some simple soup and dessert recipes which should have wide appeal.

Apart from some unique food combinations in the recipe section of the book, my main concern relates to some unsubstantiated health claims made in part one. Described as being backed by evidence, the author advocates for the inclusion of certain foods in the diet which are believed to 'stop or slow tumour growth'. Cognisant of this, the section is small and at no time does the author suggest that food or supplements should replace cancer treatment.

The book is targeted at patients undergoing cancer treatment and their carers. It is positively presented and may provide inspiration for patients or those preparing meals for people experiencing treatment related eating difficulties. It is inexpensive and may prove useful to have a copy handy in treatment areas to provide patients with some alternative recipe ideas.

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