

Finding Information about Complementary or Alternative Medicine

If you or someone close to you has been diagnosed with cancer, chances are that you have heard of *Complementary, Integrative or Alternative Medicine*. Complementary, integrative or alternative medicine practices can be used effectively to relieve symptoms, manage treatment side effects or improve quality of life. It can include things like acupuncture, yoga, biofeedback or dietary supplements. Beware of any complementary or alternative treatment that promises to “cure” cancer and ALWAYS discuss any program you are considering with your health care team.

Complementary medicine is typically used along with traditional medicine while *alternative medicine* usually means practices, products or treatments that are used instead of traditional medicine. Promotional information about practices and treatments can be found many places but finding reliable information about what might be best for you and your type of cancer can be difficult. For some types of practices, there is limited research and little oversight by regulatory agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). For some types of complementary practitioners, there are no license or certification requirements. It is important to do your homework and be well-informed.

Answers to the questions below may help you decide what might be right for you:

- Does the treatment or product claim to cure cancer or will it help relieve symptoms or side effects or reduce stress?
- What are the qualifications of any person providing the treatment or recommending a product?
- What scientific studies have been done and where this research is published?
- What does my doctor say about the treatment, practice or product?
- What if any side effects have been reported?
- What is known about the safety of the treatment or product?
- Can this treatment, product or practice interfere with my cancer treatment?
- How much does it cost? Will my insurance cover any part of it?

Below is a partial list of groups that offer reliable information:

National Center for Complementary and
 Alternative Medicine
 (888) 644-6226
www.nccam.nih.gov

United States Food and Drug Administration
 (888) 463-6332
www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements

National Cancer Institute
 (800) 422-6237
www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/treatment/cam

National Council Against Health Fraud
www.ncahf.org

American Cancer Society
 (888) 227- 2345
www.cancer.org