

WHAT IS COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE, AND CAN IT BE USED SAFELY?

INTRODUCTION

Cancer often harms a person's physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and the treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, can be just as devastating. People with cancer are all too familiar with these effects: anxiety, depression, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, pain, sleep disturbances, to list just a few. Dealing with these effects can take a toll on patients, leading many to look to alternatives. *Complementary and alternative medicine*, or CAM, has become widely used among people with cancer seeking relief from these symptoms and side effects. But this increased use comes with many questions. The purpose of this book is to give you an introduction to CAM and its use in cancer symptom management. We will examine many different therapies that are being used by people with cancer and will provide information on symptom management, drug interactions and contraindications, CAM use by cancer site, and general health and wellness.

With the distressing effects of cancer and its treatment, it is tempting to want to try anything and ev-

everything touted as a “cure” for a particular symptom or ailment you are experiencing. However, regardless of how “natural” or “safe” they may seem, these products have the potential to harm just as readily as any drug can. Before starting any new therapy or practice, it is important that you talk to your health-care providers.

Keeping you safe during and after your cancer treatment is a primary aim for this handbook. Although we have learned much about CAM through some ongoing research, many questions remain. Therefore, we have included details on reliable resources so you can stay current on this information.

Experts do not always agree about how safe and effective CAM therapies may be. By becoming an informed consumer and communicating openly with your healthcare providers, you can determine whether CAM is appropriate for use in the management of your health.

WHO USES CAM?

According to national surveys, more than 80% of Americans, and more than half of people with cancer, use some form of CAM. The costs are staggering: \$33.9 billion in out-of-pocket spending, according to a recent government survey. With this level of usage, the ability to determine whether a therapy is safe and effective is critical.

WHY DO PEOPLE USE CAM?

The reasons for using CAM are as varied as the types of therapies used. Many people use them to

promote general wellness. Others use these therapies to manage symptoms of a diagnosed condition or side effects of a medical treatment. CAM therapies may be used to promote comfort and relaxation. And people with cancer often use these therapies to complement their medical therapy or to allow them to be active participants in their cancer treatment.

CAN THESE THERAPIES INTERFERE WITH CANCER TREATMENT?

Some CAM therapies have the potential to interfere with cancer treatment such as chemotherapy drugs. In addition, some may interfere with therapies for other conditions. Just because something is labeled *natural* does not mean it is *safe*. Even seemingly harmless “natural” supplements can have strong interactions with medications. More on this topic appears in Chapter 3.

DO I HAVE TO TELL ALL OF MY HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS ABOUT MY CAM USE?

To help keep you safe from negative interactions or a negative effect on treatment, it is important that you tell all of your healthcare providers about any CAM therapies you are using, including herbal products and other supplements.

If any CAM practitioner tells you that the therapy he or she offers is a secret and you should not discuss it with your healthcare providers, be very cautious. Likewise, if a practitioner makes promises about “cures,” talk to your healthcare provider before making any decisions about it.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS?

It is important to advise your healthcare providers about any herbs, nutritional supplements, vitamins, teas, poultices, and over-the-counter medications you use, whether regularly or just sometimes. Also, inform them of any methods that you use, such as relaxation, guided imagery, Reiki, healing touch, hypnosis, or meditation, whether regularly or occasionally. Once your cancer treatment has ended, it is still important to tell your healthcare providers about any new interventions or methods you have decided to use.

CHOOSING A CAM PRACTITIONER WISELY

Credentialing and Licensure

A CAM practitioner is an individual who delivers CAM therapies and may have certification or licensure from a state or national program. Being “certified” does not always indicate that the practitioner is licensed. *Licensure* refers to the laws that regulate an occupation. These laws protect against unqualified practitioners using a particular occupational title and define the scope of practice of that occupation. Licensure occurs at the state level, and the scope of practice may vary from state to state. In most states, CAM providers who lack licensure could be viewed as diagnosing, treating, and practicing medicine on patients unlawfully.

Certification is a formal recognition by an accrediting body that a practitioner has met predetermined qualifications such as education, practice hours, and examinations. National certification ensures that a

professional's credentials will be recognized in most or all states and that the scope of practice is the same or similar in each state.

Selecting a CAM Practitioner

If you are considering a CAM therapy, start by talking with your primary healthcare provider about any CAM therapies you use now and what you may be interested in using in the future. Your healthcare provider may be able to answer questions or refer you to a reputable CAM practitioner. Also, CAM practitioners can be found through professional organizations. Collect information such as education, experience, and cost. Check with your insurance provider to see which practitioners accept your insurance. Make an appointment to speak to the potential practitioner in person or by telephone. Choose a CAM practitioner based on the person's answers to your questions and your level of comfort during the interview. Explain what you do to manage your health to help ensure coordinated and safe care. Assess the practitioner after your initial treatment visit, weighing what you have been told to expect in terms of therapy outcomes, time, and costs. Tips for talking with your healthcare providers about CAM are available online as part of the "Time to Talk" campaign at <http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/forpatients.htm>. Examples of CAM practices with educational preparation, licensure, and credentialing criteria appear in Chapter 2.

Finding an Integrative Medicine Center

Over the past few decades, integrative medicine programs have begun to open across the country. Integrative medicine combines treatments from conven-

tional medicine and CAM that have evidence of safety and effectiveness. Integrative medicine programs offer a variety of services and may be freestanding, associated with a network of providers, or part of an academic health center. The Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine (CAHCIM) represents 50 academic health centers and affiliate institutions in the United States and Canada, most of which offer clinical programs that treat many conditions. If you live near one of these programs, you can contact them directly for information on referrals and clinical services. A list of centers is located at www.imconsortium.org/members/home.html, or you can contact CAHCIM by phone at 612-624-9166.

Also, many cancer centers are beginning to include integrative medicine services in their practice. Check with your local cancer centers and hospitals to see if they offer these services.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org/Treatment/TreatmentsandSideEffects/ComplementaryandAlternativeMedicine/index, or call 800-227-2345 (or 866-228-4327 for TTY). Information on CAM is also included in the sections on specific cancer sites.
- National Institutes of Health National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, <http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk>, or call 888-644-6226 (or 866-464-3615 for TTY)
- National Cancer Institute PDQ® Cancer Information Summaries, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/cam

- National Cancer Institute Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine Health Information for Patients, www.cancer.gov/cam/health_patients.html, or call 301-435-7980
- Your local cooperative extension and the public service announcement section of your local newspaper for classes on healthy cooking or cooking with herbs

RESOURCES

- “Categories of CAM therapies,” National Cancer Institute, www.cancer.gov/cam/health_categories.html
- “Paying for CAM,” National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/financial>
- “Selecting a complementary and alternative medicine practitioner,” National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/decisions/practitioner.htm>
- “Time to talk,” National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, <http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk>
- “What is CAM?” National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/whatiscam/#types>
- “What is integrative medicine?” WebMD, www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/features/alternative-medicine-integrative-medicine
- “What is the difference between having a license and being certified?” Allied Health Licensing, www.nhanow.com/certifications/why-get-certified/licensing-vs-certification.aspx