

Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Cancer



You or your healthcare provider may want to try a cancer treatment that's not part of standard medical care. Standard medicine is practiced by healthcare providers. They use treatments that have been:

- Scientifically tested in clinical trials
- Found to be safe and effective
- Approved by the FDA

Sometimes, they may also advise other therapies. These may be used to complement, or complete, a conventional treatment plan. Sometimes people hear about alternative therapies and want to know if these could help.

It's important to understand the difference between these 2 types of therapy:

- **Complementary medicine** is any type of therapy used along with standard medicine. Complementary therapy often tries to ease symptoms and improve quality of life.
- **Alternative medicine** is used alone or in place of standard medical treatment. These treatments can delay access to standard treatments that have been shown to help. Some of these treatments can be harmful.

What's thought to be complementary and alternative medicine sometimes changes. This is because these therapies may be eventually proven to be safe and effective. They then become part of standard medicine.

Different types of therapies

Therapies that may be included in your treatment plan may include:

- Hypnosis
- Massage
- Biofeedback
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Tai chi
- Guided imagery

Things to think about

Most complementary and alternative medicine fields are not standardized or controlled by standard medical guidelines. Talk with your healthcare provider before trying any of these therapies. This is important because some of these therapies may interfere with your standard treatment.

It's important to learn as much as you can when thinking about complementary or alternative therapies. Before starting any new therapy, you should:

- Talk with your healthcare provider.
- Use your library to research books, articles, and scientific journals.
- Use the Internet to do research. (Be careful of sites selling these products.)
- Look for information on controlled, scientific studies on the therapy you are thinking about.
- Talk with others who have actually tried the therapy.

Warning signs to look for

It's better to not try any treatment with the following warning signs:

- It's based on unproven theories.
- It promises or guarantees a cure.
- It's a secret and can be given only by certain providers.
- You must travel to another country to get it.
- The provider criticizes standard medicine or tells you not to use standard medicine.

Working with your healthcare provider

It's best to talk with your healthcare provider about any complementary or alternative therapy you'd like to try before spending your time and money on it. There may be ways to safely use some of these treatments. But some might cause problems if you use them along with standard treatments. Learn as much as you can so you can make the choices that are best for you.

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