

Choosing A Complementary Therapy



What is a complementary therapy?

1. A treatment that is added to or used instead of regular medical care.
2. Complementary therapies include a wide range of treatments such as
 - dietary changes
 - vitamin, mineral, herbal supplements or other medicines
 - techniques such as relaxation, visualization, meditation, etc
 - home devices such as TENS (trans-electrical nerve stimulation), ultrasound, infrared light or magnetic therapy.
 - seeing a health practitioner who performs therapies such as acupuncture, massage, therapeutic touch/healing, allergy testing etc.

What should I consider when starting a complementary therapy?

1. **Make sure that you are already making healthy lifestyle choices**, such as eating healthy food, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep and following the advice of your health care providers.
2. **Have a specific goal when trying a new therapy.**
 - Know the action & benefit from the therapy you are trying to achieve.



3. **Do your research first.**

Many complementary therapies do not have good quality scientific research to prove their benefits and risks. Therefore it is important to

- a. use reliable internet resources, such as university, government or non-profit agency websites (eg. The Arthritis Society).
- b. use reliable books or journals.
- c. ask questions.



- What research studies have been done on the product or service?
- How much, and how often is necessary to see benefit?
- How long to see benefit?
- What are the possible risks and side effects?
- Does it interact with other medications, supplements or therapies?
- Will it interfere with other medical conditions?
- What is the cost for consultations, procedures, supplements, medicines or devices?

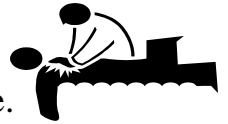
4. Work with your health care providers.

- a. If current medical care is not working well, begin by discussing your options with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, physiotherapist etc.
- b. Do not change your current medical care. Add to it as needed.
- c. Tell your health care providers about all complementary therapies you are taking or using. Keep a list in your wallet of all current medications, supplements or other therapies.



5. Choose a qualified practitioner.

- a. Check the professional qualifications of the person providing the service.
- b. Interview the person. Determine what kind of attention and support you can expect from the person. Take along documentation of your personal history and provide a list of questions that you may have.
- c. Ask what changes in your health can be expected to determine how well the treatment is working.
- d. Ask what the cost is for the consultations, procedures, supplements, medicines or devices.
- e. Attend a talk by the practitioner in the community.



6. Improve your diet first, before using supplements.

Nutrients are best absorbed in the body from food sources. Use supplements to complement what is missing from your diet.



7. Purchase only health products that have proper certification.

These products include a DIN (drug identification number), NPN (Natural Health Product Number), DIN-HM (homeopathic medication), USP number (US Pharmacopeia), or Consumers Lab logo, or NSF international certification.

8. Take the same precautions you would with regular medical prescriptions or therapies.

Supplements taken in large amounts should be treated as drugs.



9. Try only one new therapy at a time and assess benefit.

Continue the therapy if it works, has no side effects, and is affordable.

10. Stop dietary/herbal supplements 1 to 2 weeks prior to surgery.

Many dietary/herbal supplements have biological effects (increased bleeding or sedation) that can interact with surgery or the medications required during or after the operation. Prior to surgery provide a list of all medications, supplements and therapies being used. Develop a plan with your health care providers.



Complementary Therapies

Website Resources



1. www.arthritis.ca (The Arthritis Society)
2. www.arthritis.org (The Arthritis Foundation)
3. www.arc.org.uk (Arthritis Research Campaign)
4. www.nccam.nih.gov (National Centre for Complementary & alternative Medicine)
5. <http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov/> (Office of Dietary Supplements)
6. www.canadian-health-network.ca
7. www.bcna.bc.ca (British Columbia Naturopathic Association)
8. www.infoprogram.com (Canadian website - fish oil testing results)
9. www.mayoclinic.com
10. www.bastyr.edu/library (Bastyr University - trains naturopathic physicians & offers many alternative health resources)
11. www.pitt.edu/~cbw/altm.html (University of Pittsburgh - Alternative Medicine Homepage)
12. www.quackwatch.org
13. www.naturaldatabase.com (\$\$)
14. www.consumerlab.com (\$\$)

Written Resources



1. Arthritis Today Supplement Guide (updated every 1 – 2 years)
2. Judith Horstman (1999). The Arthritis Foundation's Guide to Alternative Therapies, Atlanta: Arthritis Foundation
3. Weinblatt, Michael, (2000). The Arthritis Action Program: An Integrated Plan of Traditional & Complementary Therapies. New York: Simon & Schuster
4. Tyler, Varro & Foster, Steven (1999). Tyler's Honest Herbal: A sensible Guide to the Use of Herbs & Related Remedies, New York: Haworth Press Inc
5. Marray, Michasel & Pizzorno, Joseph (1998). Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine, 2nd ed, Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing,
6. Davis, Martha, et al. (1988). The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook. Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger,
7. Kabat-Zinn, Jon (1991). Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body to Face Stress, Pain and Illness. New York: Dell Publishing Co.
8. Swanson, DW, (1999). Mayo Clinic on Chronic Pain, New York: Kensington.