

## Your Health: Complementary Medicine



Complementary medicine includes many therapies you can use along with standard medical treatment. Yoga, meditation, and massage are examples. They are used to treat anything from hot flashes to high blood pressure.

### When is complementary medicine used?

You can use complementary medicine for most health problems. But you may want to think about why you want to try it. Are you looking for a cure? Or are you looking for comfort and better quality of life? Seeking a "cure" through this type of medicine alone may disappoint you. Be realistic, and be careful. If a medicine or therapy sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Be sure to tell your doctor about any complementary therapies you use or want to use.

### What are some examples?

**Homeopathy** is also called homeopathic medicine. It uses mixtures that have a small amount of a plant or mineral to treat disease. This type of treatment is not usually advised for serious illnesses, such as:

- Cancer.
- Heart disease.
- Major infections.
- Emergencies.

**Naturopathy** is also called naturopathic medicine. It is based on the idea that there is a healing power in the body. This therapy uses organic foods, exercise, and a balanced lifestyle to promote health. Dietary supplements, medicinal plants, homeopathy, and treatments from Chinese medicine are parts of this therapy as well.

**Ayurveda** is also called ayurvedic medicine. Its focus is on good health. The treatment is based on preventing illness with massage, meditation, yoga, and a healthy diet. Herbal medicines are used.

**Chiropractic** is a hands-on therapy often used for back and neck pain. Chiropractors use quick, gentle, pressing motions to adjust joints mainly in the spine.

**Acupuncture** is a Chinese therapy that has been used for hundreds of years. The acupuncturist puts very thin needles into the skin at certain points on the body. This is done to balance the energy flow and help relieve pain.

### What are the risks?

The greatest risk is that you may use these treatments **instead** of going to your regular doctor. Complementary therapies should be **in addition** to treatment from your doctor.

Otherwise you may miss important treatment that could save your life.

**Other risks are:**

- Many complementary treatments and medicines have not yet been studied to see how safe they are or how well they work. Some treatments, such as prayer or music therapy, are hard to study.
- You could have a dangerous reaction when you combine some complementary medicines and standard medicines. For example, diet supplements (such as herbal medicines and natural products) can vary widely in how strong they are and in how they react to other medicines.

**What are the benefits?**

Some complementary therapies work as well as standard medicine. They often cost less but may not be covered by insurance. They may have fewer side effects. For example, acupuncture may reduce arthritis pain with fewer side effects than medicine.

Another benefit is that most practitioners use a holistic or "whole person" approach to your treatment. They look at your lifestyle, background, and habits, as well as your physical health.

With complementary therapy, you have a more active role in your health care. You may feel more in control of your health. And you may feel better, because you are working toward overall wellness.

**Questions to ask your doctor**

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

**Questions about complementary therapies:**