

USING COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES WITH CONVENTIONAL TREATMENTS

The terms "complementary medicine" and "alternative medicine" often are used interchangeably. However, though they sometimes refer to the same modalities, the two are very different.

Complementary medicine is *used together* with traditional Western medicine. Alternative medicine is used *in place of* conventional medicine. Many patients use both conventional treatments and complementary therapies. There is no scientific evidence that any complementary therapy can cure cancer but they can help with side effects and optimize immune function. Complementary therapies work best as part of your total treatment plan, combined with conventional medical treatments. They focus on areas often neglected by conventional medicine that may improve overall health and survival.

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES CAN:

- Help you feel better and improve your quality of life
- Improve your general health and immunity
- Give you a sense of control over what is happening
- Reduce stress, tension, sleeplessness, anxiety and depression and make you feel more relaxed
- Help reduce the symptoms of cancer, such as pain, feeling sick, breathlessness, constipation, diarrhea, tiredness and poor appetite
- Help reduce the side effects of cancer treatment such as nausea, joint pain, fatigue, 'chemo brain', sexual side effects
- Improve conventional treatment efficacy

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Can the therapy interfere with conventional treatment?
- What do you expect to gain from a complementary therapy?
- How do you choose a complementary therapy?
- How do you know if a therapy is working for you?
- Is the therapy covered by insurance?
- Is the therapy safe or can it cause harm or side effects?
- Are there established standards for the therapy? Is the therapist qualified?
- Has research been done about the effectiveness of the therapy?
- Are there medical records or clinical trials offering scientific support of treatment?

How to know if a complementary therapy is working for you: Subjective VS. Objective

Subjective responses include improved energy, appetite and well-being. Do you feel any different?

Objective data would include testing to see if there is a change.

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES INCLUDE:

- Medical systems: Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, homeopathy, naturopathy
- Mind-body interventions: biofeedback, hypnosis, meditation, yoga, guided imagery
- Biologically based therapies: foods, vitamins, both herbal and nonherbal dietary supplements.
- Manipulation and body-based methods: massage, chiropractic, osteopathy, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique
- Energy therapies: acupuncture, Reiki, magnets, therapeutic touch

AS WELL AS:

- Dietary modification
- Exercise (3-4 hours per week)
- Sleep (at least 7-8 hours per night in darkness)
- Elimination of hormone disrupting and toxic chemicals
- Art or Music Therapy
- Support groups/Counseling/Therapy

IN EVALUATING A THERAPY: Be open minded yet skeptical

- ASK QUESTIONS and ALWAYS do your own research
- Be cautiously open-minded
- Learn about the potential risks and benefits
- Look at the type and number of studies being done and the consistency of findings

TESTING BEFORE AND AFTER: There are a number of tests not normally done for routine cancer testing that may give a patient information on immune status, hormone balance, chemical exposures, and nutrient status. This is a way to evaluate if something is working for you.

YOU CAN TEST FOR: Vitamin D levels; Toxic exposures and chemicals; Hormonal Balance; Nutritional Status; Digestive Function, etc.

LABS THAT DO SPECIALIZED TESTING: AIT Laboratories - www.aitlabs.com; Genova Diagnostic/Metametrix - www.gdx.net

RESEARCHING INFORMATION: There are millions of websites out there but anyone can set up a website and put up information that looks reliable. To distinguish between what is reliable information and what isn't, the information on a website should tell you the source. They may include a list of journal article references or links to the books they used.

USEFUL WEBSITES: Pubmed.gov; National Cancer Institute Complementary and Alternative Medicine- cancer.gov/cancertopics/cam

Before using any Complementary therapy, patients should talk with their doctors —to make sure that all aspects of their cancer care work together.