

TIME TO TALK.



Ask



Tell

Patients and their health care providers need to talk openly about all of their health care practices. This includes the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

TIME TO TALK: The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at the National Institutes of Health has launched an educational campaign—*Time to Talk*—to encourage the discussion of CAM use. As the Federal Government’s lead agency for scientific research on CAM, NCCAM is committed to providing evidence-based CAM information to help health professionals and the public make health care decisions.

Why Talk?

To ensure safe, coordinated care among all conventional and CAM therapies, it’s time to talk. Talking not only allows fully integrated care, but it also minimizes risks of interactions with a patient’s conventional treatments. When patients tell their providers about their CAM use, they can better stay in control and more effectively manage their health. When providers ask their patients about CAM use, they can ensure that they are fully informed and can help patients make wise health care decisions.

In a nationwide Government survey, nearly 50 percent of all adults age 18 or older reported using some form of CAM (excluding prayer) during their lifetime, and 36 percent of adults reported CAM use in the past year; people age 50 to 59 were among the most likely to report using CAM.¹ However, in a survey of people age 50 or older, less than one-third of those who reported using CAM have discussed it with their physicians.²

CAM is defined as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. CAM includes products and practices such as herbal supplements, meditation, chiropractic care, and acupuncture.

NCCAM and AARP Survey: NCCAM and AARP recently partnered on a consumer telephone survey to measure and understand communication practices between patients age 50 or older and their physicians.

The survey confirms that patients and physicians often do not discuss the use of CAM. The primary reasons are that **patients do not know** that they should tell their providers about their CAM use, and **physicians do not ask their patients** about CAM use.

¹ Barnes PM, Powell-Griner E, McFann K, Nahin RL. Complementary and alternative medicine use among adults: United States, 2002. *CDC Advance Data Report* #343. 2004.

² AARP, NCCAM. *Complementary and Alternative Medicine: What People 50 and Older Are Using and Discussing with Their Physicians*. Consumer Survey Report; January 18, 2007.

What Else Did the NCCAM/AARP Survey Find?

CAM Use

- Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (63%) have used one or more CAM therapy.

Communication With Providers About CAM Use

- Of those age 50 or older who use CAM, more than two-thirds (69%) did not talk to their physicians about it.
- The most common reasons cited by respondents who had seen physicians but had not discussed CAM with them were that the physician never asked (42%), they did not know they should (30%), and there was not enough time during the office visit (19%).
- More than one-half of respondents (56%) who had talked about CAM with their physician said they—not their physician—had initiated the CAM discussion.

Topics Discussed With Providers

- For respondents who talked with their providers about CAM, the topics most frequently discussed were the effectiveness of a CAM therapy (67%), what to use (64%), how a CAM therapy might interact with other medications or treatments they receive (60%), advice on whether or not to pursue a CAM therapy (60%), and the safety of a CAM therapy (57%).

Reasons for Using CAM

- Of those who have used CAM, two-thirds did so to treat a specific condition (66%) and for overall wellness (65%).

Use of Conventional Medicine

- Nearly three-fourths of respondents (74%) said they take one or more prescription medicines, and more than one-half (59%) said they take one or more over-the-counter medicines. Twenty percent of respondents reported currently taking more than five prescription medicines.

Demographic Differences

- Women were more likely than men to discuss “what to use” with their physicians (26% vs. 16%).
- Men were more likely than women not to have discussed CAM because their physician never asked (46% vs. 38%).
- Non-Hispanic white respondents were more likely to say their physician never asked (44%) compared with non-Hispanic black respondents (25%).
- Respondents in younger age groups (50-54 and 55-64) were more likely to say they had not discussed CAM with their physician because their physician never asked (50% and 44%, respectively) compared with those 65 and older (36%).

Tips to Start Talking

Patient Tips for Discussing CAM With Providers

- When completing patient history forms, be sure to include all therapies and treatments you use. Make a list in advance.
- Tell your health care providers about all therapies or treatments—including over-the-counter and prescription medicines, as well as herbal and dietary supplements.
- Take control. Don't wait for your providers to ask about your CAM use.
- If you are considering a new CAM therapy, ask your health care providers about its safety, effectiveness, and possible interactions with medications (both prescription and over-the-counter).

Provider Tips for Discussing CAM With Patients

- Include a question about CAM use on medical history forms.
- Ask your patients to bring a list of all therapies they use, including prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal therapies, and other CAM practices.
- Have your medical staff initiate the conversation.

Free Toolkit for Health Care Providers

Health care providers may order a FREE toolkit that includes posters, tip sheets, patient wallet cards, and other resource information to help encourage discussion of CAM use. To order a free toolkit, call the NCCAM Clearinghouse at 1-888-644-6226.

For more information on *Time to Talk* or to read the full NCCAM/AARP report, please visit nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

NCCAM's mission is to explore complementary and alternative medical practices in the context of rigorous science, train CAM researchers, and disseminate authoritative information to the public and professionals. For additional information, call NCCAM's Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226, or visit nccam.nih.gov.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH)—the Nation's medical research agency—includes 27 institutes and centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

CAM Resources

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine
nccam.nih.gov

AARP—Complementary and Alternative Medicine
www.aarp.org/health/staying_healthy/prevention/complementary_and_alternative_medicine.html

MedlinePlus—Alternative Medicine
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alternativemedicine.html

MedlinePlus—Herbs and Supplements
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/herb_All.html

National Institutes of Health—Office of Dietary Supplements
dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov

National Cancer Institute—Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine
www.cancer.gov/cam

National Institute on Aging—Age Page on Dietary Supplements
www.niapublications.org/agepages/supplements.asp



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