

Tips for Talking With Your Health Care Providers About CAM

Like many Americans, you may be using or considering some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). If so, it is a good idea to talk with your health care providers about your CAM use. This fact sheet explains why and offers some tips to help you get the conversation started.

Key Points

- Tell your health care providers about all the complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.
- Be proactive. Don't wait for your health care providers to ask about your CAM use.
- When you talk with your health care providers about CAM, make the most of the conversation. Bring a list of everything you use, keep a record of the information you receive, and ask questions if something is unclear.

About CAM

CAM refers to health-related products and practices that are not presently considered part of conventional medicine. Examples include herbal supplements, acupuncture, chiropractic manipulation, and many others.

Reasons for Talking With Your Health Care Providers About CAM Use

- Some CAM approaches can have an effect on conventional medicines. Talking with your health care providers about your CAM use will help ensure coordinated and safe care.
- Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other health care providers can help you decide whether a particular CAM therapy is right for you. They can answer questions, suggest reliable sources of information, and point out potential benefits and risks.

- You are an important part of a team that includes all of the health care providers you rely on to manage your health. Giving your team a complete picture of everything you do to take care of your health makes them your fully informed partners—and it helps **you** stay in control of your own health care.

Tips for Talking With Your Health Care Providers About CAM

- Don't wait for your health care providers to ask about your CAM use. **Be proactive**—start the conversation.
- Keep a current list of all of your therapies and treatments, including over-the-counter and prescription medicines as well as any CAM products such as herbal and dietary supplements. Also note any medical specialists or CAM practitioners you see. Take the list with you whenever you visit a health care provider. Be sure to tell your health care providers about all of your therapies and treatments. Also include all therapies and treatments on any patient history forms you fill out.
- Gather information on the CAM therapy you're interested in. The resources listed below (see "For More Information") are a good place to start. You may want to take copies with you; that way, you and your health care provider can refer to them as you talk, and your health care provider can help you evaluate the information.
- Make a list of the things you want to talk about. For example, if you're considering taking an herbal supplement, you might include:
 - Why I want to take the supplement
 - How I found out about it
 - Is it safe for me to take? Will it interact with any of my medications?
 - Is it likely to help me?
 - What else should I know about it? Where can I find more information?
 - Should I try this? If not, why not? Might something else be better?
- Take a notepad or tape recorder with you. Listen carefully and keep a record of what you find out. You may want to ask a family member or friend to accompany you, so you can compare notes after your visit.
- If something is unclear to you, or if you want more information, don't be afraid to ask. Your health care providers may not be able to answer every question, but they can help you find the answers.

Selected References

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. *Time to Talk: Tell Your Health Care Provider About Your Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine Web site. Accessed at <http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/forpatients.htm> on April 8, 2008.

National Institute on Aging. *Talking With Your Doctor*. National Institute on Aging Web site. Accessed at <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/talkingwithyourdoctor/toc.html> on April 8, 2008.

National Library of Medicine. *Health Topics: Talking With Your Doctor*. MedlinePlus Web site. Accessed at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/talkingwithyourdoctor.html> on April 8, 2008.

U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. *Questions Are the Answer: Talking With Your Clinician*. U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Web site. Accessed at <http://www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer> on April 8, 2008.

For More Information

NCCAM Clearinghouse

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) Clearinghouse provides information on CAM and NCCAM, including publications and searches of Federal databases of scientific and medical literature. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

Web site: nccam.nih.gov

E-mail: info@nccam.nih.gov

PubMed®

A service of the National Library of Medicine (NLM), PubMed contains publication information and (in most cases) brief summaries of articles from scientific and medical journals. CAM on PubMed, developed jointly by NCCAM and NLM, is a subset of the PubMed system and focuses on the topic of CAM.

Web site: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez

CAM on PubMed: nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/

*This publication is not copyrighted and is in the public domain.
Duplication is encouraged.*

NCCAM has provided this material for your information. It is not intended to substitute for the medical expertise and advice of your primary health care provider. We encourage you to discuss any decisions about treatment or care with your health care provider. The mention of any product, service, or therapy is not an endorsement by NCCAM.

National Institutes of Health



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

