

## **Time to Talk: Patients and Health Care Providers Need To Discuss Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use**

Do you tell your health care providers if and how you use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)? According to a recent national survey conducted by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) of the National Institutes of Health and AARP, two-thirds of people aged 50 and older are using some form of complementary and alternative medicine. But in spite of the high use of CAM among this group, 69 percent are NOT discussing use of CAM with their physicians. Full disclosure of all health care therapies is essential to every patient's evaluation and ensures safe, coordinated care.

CAM is 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, and acupuncture.

“As high users of CAM, people 50 and older need to understand the importance of discussing CAM use with their health care providers,” Josephine P. Briggs, M.D., director of NCCAM. “Simply put, it's time to talk!”

Respondents of the NCCAM/AARP national survey cited the most common reasons why doctor-patient dialogue is lacking as:

- The physician never asked (42%)
- They did not know they should (30%)
- There was not enough time during the office visit (19%).

**SAMPLE QUOTE:** *Said Jane Smith, executive director, name of organization, “As health care consumers, we need to be proactive. When we talk about CAM use, we help our providers to be fully informed and partners in our care.”*

Tips for Talking to Your Health Care Providers About CAM:

- 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.
- Don't wait for your providers to ask about your CAM use. Say it first.
- 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 nonprescription).

NCCAM has launched its provider and patient educational campaign – *Time to Talk* – to encourage the discussion of CAM use. For more information on *Time to Talk* or to read the full AARP/NCCAM report on CAM use communication, please visit

<http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/>.

**CAM Resources from the National Institutes of Health:**

- **National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health** – [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov) or 1-888-644-6226
- **MedlinePlus** – [medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov)
- **NIH Office of Dietary Supplements** – [www.ods.od.nih.gov](http://www.ods.od.nih.gov)
- **National Cancer Institute Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine** – [www.cancer.gov/cam](http://www.cancer.gov/cam)