

Complementary / Alternative Medicine (CAM)

The Safety of CAM

Some CAM therapies have undergone careful evaluation and have been found to be generally safe and effective. These include acupuncture, yoga, and meditation to name a few. However, there are others that do not work, may be harmful, or could interact negatively with your medicines.

Natural Does Not Mean Safe

CAM therapies include a wide variety of botanicals and nutritional products, such as herbal and dietary supplements, and vitamins. These products do not have to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before being sold to the public. Also, a prescription isn't needed to buy them. Therefore, it's up to you to decide what's best for you. Some tips to keep in mind:

- Herbal supplements may be harmful when taken by themselves, with other substances, or in large doses. For example, some studies have shown that kava kava, an herb that has been used to help with stress and anxiety, may cause liver damage. And St. John's wort, which some people use for depression, may cause certain cancer drugs to not work as well as they should.
- Tell your doctor if you're taking any dietary supplements, even vitamins, no matter how safe you think they are. This is very important. Even though there may be ads or claims that something has been used for years, they do not prove that it's safe or effective. This is even more true when combined with your medicines.
- Talk with your doctor about what you should be eating. It's common for people with cancer to have questions about different foods to eat during treatment. Yet it's important to know there isn't just one food or special diet that has proven to control cancer.
- It's always important for you to have a healthy diet, but especially now. Do the best you can to have a well-rounded approach, eating a variety of foods that are good for you. For advice about eating during and after cancer treatment, see the NCI booklet, Eating Hints.

Talk with Your Medical Care Team and Pharmacist Before You Use CAM

Cancer patients who want to use CAM should talk with their doctor or nurse. This is important because things that seem safe could be harmful or even interfere with your cancer treatment. It's also a good idea to learn if the therapy you're thinking about has been proven to do what it claims to do.

If you have a hormone positive cancer DO NOT USE the following:

Phytoestrogen	Stimulates certain breast cancer cells	Activity at ER in animal studies
Black cohosh Chasteberry Comfrey Daidzen	Dong quai Genistein	Chickweed Cramp Bark Flaxseed Ginseng

Patient Education

Dong quai Genistein Licorice Kudza root Medicago Wild yam		Hops flower Maca root Milk thistle Motherwort Nettle Red Clover Rhodelia rosea Saw Palmetto
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References:

For further information and drug/herb/vitamin specific information please visit:

<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam> - National Cancer Institute

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/herbsataglance> - National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health