

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

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Background

Complementary Medicine (CM) or Integrative Medicine (IM) is when alternative medicine is used together with functional medical treatment, in a belief that it improves the effect of treatments. Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is the term for medical products and practices that are not part of standard medical care. People with cancer may use CAM to: Help cope with the side effects of cancer treatments, such as nausea, pain, and fatigue, Comfort them and ease the worries of cancer treatment and related stress, Feel that they are doing something to help with their own care, Try to treat or cure their cancer. Complementary medicine is used along with standard medical treatment but is not considered by itself to be standard treatment. One example is using acupuncture to help lessen some side effects of cancer treatment. Integrative medicine is an approach to medical care that combines standard medicine with CAM practices that have shown through science to be safe and effective. This approach often stresses the patient's preferences, and it attempts to address the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of health. Alternative medicine is used instead of standard medical treatment. One example is using a special diet to treat cancer instead of cancer drugs that are prescribed by an oncologist.

Types of Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Scientists learn about CAM therapies every day, but there is still more to learn. Some of the therapies listed below still need more research to prove that they can be helpful. If you have cancer, you should discuss your thoughts about using CAM with your health care provider before using the therapies listed below. People may use the term "natural," "holistic," "home remedy," or "Eastern Medicine" to refer to CAM. However, experts often use five categories to describe it. These are listed below with examples for each.

Mind-Body Therapies

These combine mental focus, breathing, and body movements to help relax the body and mind. Some examples are:

Meditation: Focused breathing or repetition of words or phrases to quiet the mind.

Biofeedback: Using simple machines, the patient learns how to affect certain body functions that are normally out of one's awareness such as heart rate.

Hypnosis: A state of relaxed and focused attention in which a person concentrates on a certain feeling, idea, or suggestion to aid in healing.

Yoga: Systems of stretches and poses, with special attention given to breathing.

Tai Chi: Involves slow, gentle movements with a focus on the breath and concentration.

Imagery: Imagining scenes, pictures, or experiences to help the body heal.

Creative outlets: Interests such as art, music, or dance.

Biologically Based Practices

This type of CAM uses things found in nature. Some examples are:

Vitamins and dietary supplements.

Botanicals, which are plants or parts of plants. One type is cannabis.

Herbs and spices such as turmeric or cinnamon.

Special foods or diets.

Manipulative and Body-Based Practices

These are based on working with one or more parts of the body. Some examples are:

Massage: The soft tissues of the body are kneaded, rubbed, tapped, and stroked.

Chiropractic therapy: A type of manipulation of the spine, joints, and skeletal system.

Reflexology: Using pressure points in the hands or feet to affect other parts of the body.

Biofield Therapy

Biofield therapy, sometimes called energy medicine, involves the belief that the body has energy fields that can be used for healing and wellness. Therapists use pressure or move the body by placing their hands in or through these fields. Some examples are:

Reiki: Balancing energy either from a distance or by placing hands on or near the patient

Therapeutic touch: Moving hands over energy fields of the body

Whole Medical Systems

These are healing systems and beliefs that have evolved over time in different cultures and parts of the world. Some examples are:

Ayurvedic medicine: A system from India in which the goal is to cleanse the body and restore balance to the body, mind, and spirit.

Traditional Chinese medicine: Based on the belief that health is a balance in the body of two forces called yin and yang. Acupuncture is

a common practice in Chinese medicine that involves stimulating certain points on the body to promote health, or to lessen disease symptoms and treatment side effects.

Homeopathy: Uses very small doses of substances to trigger the body to heal itself.

Naturopathic medicine: Uses various methods that help the body naturally heal itself. An example would be herbal treatments.