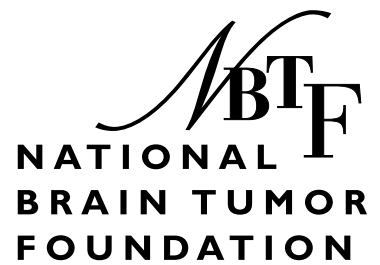


Fact Sheet

CAM Therapies



*giving help,
giving hope®*

Revised 2004

A General Overview of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Therapies

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What is complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)?

Complementary describes a therapy that is used “in addition to” — or — “to complement” a conventional therapy. (For brain tumor patients, conventional therapy generally means surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy.) An alternative therapy is one that is used “instead of” conventional therapy. The more contemporary term “integrative” refers to the combination of unconventional and conventional therapies.

The National Institute of Health’s (NIH) National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) describes seven categories of CAM:

- ✓ Alternative Systems of Medical Care
- ✓ Mind-Body Medicine
- ✓ Herbal Medicine
- ✓ Diet, Nutrition and Lifestyle Changes
- ✓ Pharmacological and Biological Therapies
- ✓ Manual Healing Methods
- ✓ Bioelectromagnetic Therapies

ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS OF MEDICAL CARE include Naturopathy, Ayurvedic Medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine and others. These are not a single therapy as such, but rather, a way of being. They stress patient responsibility and combine different techniques that influence the body, mind, and spirit. The emphasis is on the prevention of disease and maintaining balance within the person — physically, mentally, and spiritually.

MIND-BODY MEDICINE uses the mind and spirit in an effort to influence the body. They include but are not limited to guided imagery/visualization and relaxation, meditation, spiritual practices or beliefs, hypnosis, yoga, biofeedback and creative art therapies. Patient participation is central to the use of these therapies. These therapies are frequently used to manage symptoms.

HERBAL MEDICINE is the use of herbs for medicinal purposes. Common herbs used today include Gingko Biloba, Echinacea, St. John’s Wort, and many others. Herbs have been used for thousands of years in other cultures. The appeal in western culture is that they are “natural” and patients seek less or non-toxic therapies. The problem arises when one equates “natural” with “safe.” There can be interactions when combining medicinal herbs with conventional medicine. In the U.S. herbs are classified as dietary supplements and the amount of active

ingredient in each capsule or tablet is not standardized. This means that you do not always know the dose or quality of the herb you are buying and how effective it can be. Brain tumor patients should always communicate with their treating doctor or nurse about any alternative or complementary supplements or medications they are taking.

DIET, NUTRITION AND LIFESTYLE includes the use of nutrition, special nutritional programs or diets and exercise to influence health and well-being. The appeal of these types of programs is that they can be immediately implemented and are under the control of the patient. The patient should always be concerned about any very restrictive programs as nutritional deficiencies may develop. The use of nutritional supplements is controversial and more research is needed. For more information please contact the National Brain Tumor Foundation for our nutrition fact sheet.

PHARMACOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL THERAPIES include unproven therapies most often accessed as “alternative.” These therapies include shark cartilage, laetrile, and others. Many of these therapies lack scientific research to verify their claims. That is, there is no scientific research that proves them helpful.

MANUAL HEALING METHODS are essentially complementary therapies and include massage, therapeutic touch, Reiki, reflexology, and others. The benefits of these therapies seem obvious to the patients using them but research is limited with regard to many of these therapies.

BIOELECTROMAGNETIC THERAPIES include the use of acupuncture, magnets, and others. These therapies are primarily complementary and may be helpful for symptom management. Acupuncture is the one therapy in this category that has positive results in pain management documented by research studies. For some of the other therapies, research is scant but the interest in funded research is increasing.

How do I find the right complementary or alternative therapy for me?

First and foremost, check with your treating physician to be sure that this therapy will not react with any medications you are taking and that you are aware of potential side effects. The therapy chosen should suit your belief system as well as your diagnosis. Knowing yourself is pivotal. For example, if you do not like the idea of touch, then manual healing methods may not be the best choice for you.

In addition, be careful if a therapy is a “secret,” claims to be a “cure,” or if there is no information available. Ask your practitioner what type of information they have about the therapy, how it has been used, what type of reactions patients have had, etc.

How do I choose a practitioner of CAM?

It is important to determine the credibility and character of the practitioner or person who will be doing the therapy. Verify licensure. There are credentialing organizations that will verify completion of an appropriate course of study. Most practitioners study for years — not weeks or weekends. Call your State Board of Education and Professional Licensure. Ask for verification of training and then contact the training body for credentialing. Use reliable Internet resources such as the NIH NCCAM Website (see below). You can also contact the National Brain Tumor Foundation for a list of professional CAM organizations.

How can I combine (integrate) CAM into my health care while still using conventional therapy?

Begin by familiarizing yourself with the different types of therapies. Then speak with the health care professional who is responsible for the coordination of your care. Consider using local practitioners who are also licensed in areas such as medicine, nursing, physical therapy, social work, or counseling as well as the CAM therapy you are considering.

What can I expect to accomplish with CAM therapies?

Most often these therapies are used for supportive care; they help manage the symptoms related to your diagnosis and/or therapies used to treat it. Quality of life may also be improved. Whether or not these therapies can effectively treat a brain tumor is yet to be scientifically determined. Currently, some of these therapies are being studied in clinical trials.

How do I report a serious reaction or problem?

There is a way to report adverse events associated with any medical product, such as a drug or medical device. Reporting is a voluntary activity and a detailed report is necessary for the information to be entered into the database. You may call: 1.888.SAFEFOOD or access on the Internet at www.fda.gov/medwatch/

Are there any CAM therapies specifically fo brain tumor patients?

Brain tumor patients use a variety of the above-mentioned therapies. However, there have been few clinical trials testing whether there is any proven benefit specifically for brain

tumor patients. It is recommended that brain tumor patients conduct thorough research from a variety of reliable resources. Any therapies you are considering should be discussed with your treating physician before beginning any CAM therapy. The National Brain Tumor Foundation has recently started funding CAM research projects in the hopes of finding scientifically proven complementary therapies that may benefit brain tumor patients.

How can I get more information about current CAM therapy research?

Below is a list of books and other resources that can provide you with more information about currently funded research projects and centers.

CAM Reading List:

Decker, G. (2000) *An Introduction to Complementary and Alternative Therapies*. Oncology Nursing Press: Pittsburgh, PA.

Gordon, J., Curtin, S. (2000) *Comprehensive Cancer Care: Integrating Alternative, Complementary and Conventional Therapies*. Perseus Publishing: Cambridge, MA.

Lerner, M. (1997) *Choices in Healing*. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.

Wallace, Jeanne (2001) *Fact Sheet: The Healing Power of Your Fork: A Brain Tumor Survivor's Eating Plan*. National Brain Tumor Foundation: Oakland, CA. (800) 934-2873, www.braintumor.org

CAM Resources:

NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (NCCAM) Clearinghouse at 888.NIH.NCAM or visit www.nccam.nih.gov.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY provides printed information if you call their information line at 800.ACS.2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE FOUNDATION in Bethesda, MD at 301.581.0116 or visit www.amfoundation.org or www.herbmed.org.

CENTER FOR ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, MA at 617.632.7770 or visit www.compmed.caregroup.org.

THE RICHARD AND HINDA ROSENTHAL CENTER FOR COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE, Columbia, University, *College of Physicians and Surgeons*, New York, NY at 212.543.9550 or visit <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/rosenthal>.

The National Brain Tumor Foundation (NBTF) was founded in 1981 as a non-profit organization by people whose lives were affected by brain tumor disease. NBTF provides support services for patients and their families and raises funds for research to treat and cure brain tumors. For more information call 800-934-CURE.

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