

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) describes health products and practices that are not part of standard care. Standard care is what doctors, nurses and physical therapists practice.

Complementary medicine is used together with standard care. An example is using acupuncture to help with side effects of cancer treatment.

Alternative medicine is used in place of standard care. An example is treating heart disease with chelation therapy instead of standard care. This treatment tries to get rid of extra metals in the blood.

The claims about CAM treatment can sound promising. Yet, experts do not know how safe many of these treatments are or how well they work. Studies are being done to find out their safety and value.

To reduce the health risks of a CAM treatment:

- Discuss it with your doctor. It might have side effects or interact with other medicines
- Find out what the research says about it
- Choose CAM providers carefully
- Tell all of your doctors which CAM and standard treatments you use

To learn more, go to:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/complementaryandalternativemedicine.html>

Adapted from “Complementary and Alternative Medicine” by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).