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## [About Complementary and Alternative Therapies](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 03/2015

### **Key Messages:**

- Complementary therapies help patients cope with pain, fatigue, anxiety, and other side effects of cancer and its treatment. These therapies do not treat cancer, but patients may receive these therapies along with standard cancer treatments.
- Complementary therapies include physical activity, acupuncture, massage therapy, music therapy, and nutrition counseling.
- Alternative therapies are those that some people promote instead of standard cancer treatment. These therapies do not effectively treat cancer.
- Avoid alternatives. Use the complementary therapies available through your oncologist or at a nearby [National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center](#) [3].

Integrative medicine is a combination of medical treatments for cancer and complementary therapies to cope with the symptoms and side effects. You may sometimes hear integrative medicine called complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). However, there are no true “alternatives” to cancer treatment.

### **About complementary therapy**

Complementary therapies help manage symptoms and side effects and are given along with standard cancer treatment. They may help patients cope with the side effects of surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and other standard cancer treatments.

## About alternative medicine

Alternative medicine or alternative therapies are those that some people promote for use *instead* of standard medical treatment. Eating or avoiding specific foods instead of having chemotherapy is an example of an alternative therapy. Generally, alternative therapies are bogus, disproved, or unstudied methods that have no role in cancer care.

There are serious risks for patients who choose other methods instead of standard cancer treatment, including the following:

- The alternative method may make you sicker. It may cause side effects and/or work poorly with other drugs or supplements.
- An alternative therapy may keep you from starting standard treatment. Doctors choose treatment options based on the size the tumor and where it has grown or spread. If a person takes an alternative therapy instead of standard treatment, the cancer may keep growing. Over time, the standard treatment options once available may no longer work.

There are no replacements for standard cancer treatment that work. Methods marketed as alternative therapies do nothing to treat cancer. Learn more about [cancer treatment fraud](#) [4].

### More Information

[Evaluating Complementary and Alternative Therapies](#) [5]

[Complementary Therapies and Clinical Trials](#) [6]

[Side Effects](#) [7]

### Additional Resources

[National Institutes of Health: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\)](#) [8]

[Federal Trade Commission: Cancer Treatment Scams](#) [9]

[Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center: Integrative Medicine](#) [10]

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### Links

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/how-cancer-treated/integrative-medicine/about-complementary-and-alternative-therapies>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/cancer-care-team/find-nci-designated-cancer-center>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30951>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25041>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25040>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25238>

[8] <https://nccih.nih.gov/>

[9] <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0104-cancer-treatment-scams>

[10] <http://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine>