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<http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/how-cancer-treated/integrative-medicine/evaluating-complementary-and-alternative-therapies>

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

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

Key Messages:

- Ask specific questions to find out about the safety and effectiveness of complementary and alternative therapies.
Talk with your doctor before using any complementary therapies. Do not use any alternative therapies.

Many people with cancer have questions about the methods and products used as [complementary therapies](#) [3]. However, before you begin any complementary therapy, discuss all treatment options with your doctor. It is important to make sure the complementary therapy works well with your cancer treatment plan.

Some complementary therapies have research supporting their safety and effectiveness when used with standard cancer treatment. Alternative therapies, on the other hand, do not work, are often costly, and may be harmful. How are some ways to know?

First, find out who is recommending this therapy. If there are only people's personal stories and no trustworthy research, the treatment probably does not treat cancer. If news or ads about a therapy appear in mass media, but not in scientific journals, it is unlikely to help treat cancer. Learn more about [evaluating cancer information on the Internet](#) [4]. If a treatment promises to cure all cancers, the ad is a fraud. There are more than 100 different [types of cancer](#) [5]. No one treatment will work for every person or for every type of cancer.

Other considerations:

- The word "natural" does not mean "safe." For example, poisonous mushrooms are natural, but not safe. It is possible to have bad reactions to natural products, even those that are safe, particularly if a person takes large doses.
Many herbal therapies and dietary products often act like drugs in your body and cause side effects.
- Before giving a dietary or herbal product to a child, talk with his or her pediatric oncologist. A child's body uses drugs and nutrients differently and needs different doses than an adult's body.

Specific questions

Use the questions below to help find out more about a complementary or alternative therapy.

- What is the goal of this therapy? Does it work in combination with a standard therapy, or would it replace standard therapy?
- If I use this therapy instead of a standard treatment or a clinical trial, will it delay standard treatment? Could this delay be harmful? Will this therapy affect the chances of receiving treatment later?
- What research is available about this treatment's safety and effectiveness?
- Does the person offering this treatment have a license or credentials for their specialization?
Will this treatment work for the type of cancer I have? Has research supporting this treatment been published in peer-reviewed medical journals?
- Is it possible to have a reaction to or side effects from this therapy?
- Is there a clinical trial for this therapy that I can join?

Learn more about [complementary therapies and clinical trials](#) [6].

More Information

[Dietary and Herbal Products](#) [7]

[Types of Complementary Therapies](#) [8]

[How to Protect Yourself from Cancer Treatment Fraud](#) [9]

Additional Resources

[Federal Trade Commission: Cancer Treatment Scams](#) [10]

[National Cancer Institute: Thinking About Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#) [11]

[National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\): Are You Considering](#)

[Complementary Medicine?](#) [12]

Links

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/how-cancer-treated/integrative-medicine/evaluating-complementary-and-alternative-therapies>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25038>
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