

COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE THERAPIES

Questions to ask your doctor

- How do you feel about complementary therapies?
- Have you ever referred someone to a complementary therapy practitioner?
- What's the best way to find a licensed complementary therapy practitioner?
- I would like to use (name complementary therapy). Is it safe for me to use during or after my breast cancer treatment?
- Are there side effects with (name complementary therapy)?
- Are there clinical trials studying (name complementary therapy)?

Many people use complementary therapies during or after their breast cancer care.

These therapies can be used in addition to standard medical treatments. They may help improve quality of life, reduce stress and relieve side effects of treatment or the breast cancer itself. They don't treat breast cancer. You may also hear the term integrative therapies.

Types of complementary therapies

Nutritional – special diets, dietary supplements, herbs, vitamins, minerals or probiotics (such as the bacteria found in yogurt)

Psychological – practices that focus on the [mind](#), including meditation, [hypnosis](#), [relaxation therapy](#) and [music therapy](#)

Physical – practices that focus on the body, including [acupuncture](#) and [massage](#)

Combinations – therapies that combine psychological and physical practices (mind and body practices), including [yoga](#) and [tai chi](#)

Safety

Unlike standard medical treatments, complementary therapies aren't regulated by the federal government. Quality standards may not be in place. Some can be harmful for people going through cancer treatment. Some are safe, but others should be avoided. And some may be safe at lower doses, but harmful in higher amounts.

Talking with your doctor before using any complementary therapy may help



avoid problems. Your doctor can help you understand the risks and benefits of the therapy and whether it may be right for you.

Is complementary therapy right for you?

1. **Be open with your doctor.** Share your thoughts, interests and concerns about complementary therapies. Be specific about each therapy. For supplements, note the name, ingredients or show the bottle to your doctor. Also, note the name and/or provider of other therapies you are thinking about using.
2. **Understand what you are doing (or taking).** When considering a complementary therapy, do your research to find out if it's safe and effective. Discuss what you learn with your doctor.
3. **Beware of wild claims.** No complementary therapy can prevent or cure cancer. If this claim is made, it's a sign it's a scam.

This fact sheet is intended to be a brief overview. For more information, visit komen.org or call Susan G. Komen's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, or email at helpline@komen.org. Se habla español.

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Resources

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

fda.gov

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at The National Institutes of Health

nccam.nih.gov

Natural Medicines

naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com

Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS) at the National Institutes of Health

ods.od.nih.gov

Related online resources:

- [Diet and Nutrition During Treatment](#)
- [Complimentary and Integrative Therapies List](#)
- [Side Effects After Breast Cancer Treatment Ends](#)

4. **Natural does not mean safe.** Although natural products can be appealing, natural doesn't mean safe. For example, poison ivy and poisonous mushrooms are natural, but aren't safe. High-dose vitamins can also be unsafe.

5. **Look for "USP verified" on the label of dietary supplements.** With dietary supplements, there's no guarantee what's on the label is what's inside. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has limited oversight and doesn't regulate supplements as strictly as medications. Look for the "USP verified" stamp on the label (USP is the U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention) to check that a manufacturer follows good practices.

Choosing supplements from well-known makers may increase the likelihood the:

- ingredient list is accurate and complete
- dose and strength are listed correctly
- supplement doesn't have harmful levels of pesticides or heavy metals (such as lead, arsenic or mercury)

6. **Choose certified complementary therapy practitioners.** A license to practice shows a practitioner has passed the licensing requirements in their field. While seeing a licensed practitioner doesn't always mean you'll get high-quality, safe care, it's a good start.

A word about alternative therapies - beware!

Alternative therapies are used instead of standard medical treatments. They aren't proven treatments and are not recommended or safe. Standard medical treatments have been proven to reduce the chances of dying from breast cancer.



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