What is Complementary Health Care?

Medical Review: 2003

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Complementary health care is an approach to health and well-being that uses methods not considered part of traditional Western medical practices. As the name implies, complementary health care should be used with, not in place of, the medical care provided by your physician.

Complementary medicine covers a wide range of approaches, including various philosophies of healing, and many types of therapies. Some therapies are termed “holistic”, meaning that good health involves the well-being of all aspects of a person, physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional. Complementary care methods stem from the belief that health can be improved if all of these aspects of a person’s life are addressed. Many of these therapies are termed “preventive” meaning that the complementary care provider educates and provides the tools to keep health problems from arising.

What are some of the more common and widely used complementary health care methods?

- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic
- Hypnotherapy
- Massage Therapy
- Yoga

Complementary care works best when you, your physician, and the complementary care practitioner act together to help you get well and stay well.

Questions to ask your physician:

- What are your concerns about complementary care?
- Do you recommend any specific type of care?
- Will complementary care interfere with my current treatment?
- Have you ever worked professionally with a complementary practitioner?
- Do you recommend a specific practitioner?

If your physician is not able to refer you to a practitioner, you may want to contact medical regulatory and licensing agencies in your state for information on qualified practitioners. (Licensing may not be required for massage therapists, hypnotherapists, yoga instructors, or certain other practitioners).

Questions to ask your complementary health care practitioner:

- What benefits should this type of care provide?
- Are there any side effects?
- Will you work with my medical doctor?
- Has this method been successful with others with my health concerns?
- What licensing, certification, and membership in professional organizations do you have?

Whether or not to get complementary care depends on many factors. Ask your physician about complementary and alternative medical treatments and practices and how they may (or may not) be helpful for your specific health concerns.

This information is provided for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for sound medical judgment. If you have any questions or concerns, you should discuss them with your physician.

Resources:

National Institutes of Health, Office of Alternative Medicine

Related Healthy Living Links:

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Today’s Health and Wellness Magazine