

Special Health Matters

Alternative Therapies

♥ What are "Alternative Therapies?"

More and more families of special-needs children are turning to complementary, integrative or alternative medicine -- treatment options that are used in addition to, or in place of, traditional western medicine. Generally complementary, alternative and / or integrative medicine (CAM) can be defined as a broad set of health care practices that are not easily integrated into the dominant health care model, because they pose significant challenges to societal beliefs and practices. **Complementary and integrative** implies that these therapies are performed in addition to, and not in place of, conventional medicine. **Alternative** refers to therapies that are a replacement to conventional therapy. Health care-related goals of CAM are generally:

- **Use of natural remedies rather than artificial drugs**
- **Treating the cause of the problem versus the symptoms**
- **Treating the whole person instead of the disease**

Examples of CAM can include massage, herbal medicines and acupuncture, nutritional supplements, chiropractic, electromagnetic, and hyperbaric oxygen.

♥ How do I decide if CAM is right for my child?

- **Evaluate the risk and benefits critically. Both CAM and conventional care have risks and benefits. Patients and their families should be equally inquisitive when considering either type of care.**
- **All medical regimens consider the whole patient, including general nutrition, stress, accompanying conditions, family supports and spiritual belief system.**
- **Talk with your child's physician(s). The best outcomes for treatment necessitate open communication between the patient / family and physician on all medications and therapies being used.**
- **"Natural" products are not necessarily safer.**

♥ Other helpful information about CAM:

- Most effective CAM eventually becomes conventional care. The greatest increase in longevity and quality of life in the past century occurred when CAM therapies that are scientifically proven to be beneficial and cost-effective are incorporated with conventional medicine.
- Currently there are no appropriate scientific guidelines to ensure the safety and efficacy of CAM.
- More studies need to be done on complementary, alternative and / or integrative medicine and its use with children.

♥ Resources

The selected titles and links below will guide you to some key resources and references.

Center for Infants and Children with Special Needs at Cincinnati Children's Hospital (source)
<http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/svc/alpha/c/special-needs/resources/alternative.html>

Alternative Medicine: Health Care Information Resources
<http://hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/altmed.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics%3b107/3/598>

Kids Health for Parents http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/sick/alternative_medicine.html

MEDLINEplus: Health Information <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alternativemedicine.html>

NIH: "Get the Facts: Are You Considering Using Complementary and Alternative Medicine?"
<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/decisions/>

NIH: Office of Dietary Supplements <http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>

Quackwatch <http://www.quackwatch.org/index.html>

The White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy (WHCCAMP)
<http://www.whccamp.hhs.gov/finalreport.html>