

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

Complementary therapies can help with managing pain. These therapies often work by changing how you pay attention to your pain, releasing muscle tension caused by pain and encouraging overall relaxation. Some may work by releasing natural opioids within the body that can enhance the effects of pain medicine and other medical therapies. The phrases “complementary therapy” and “alternative therapy” are often used interchangeably and may be combined into one phrase – complementary and alternative medicine (CAMs). However, there is a difference between a complementary therapy and an alternative therapy.

- A complementary therapy is often used along with a conventional medical treatment.
- An alternative therapy is generally used to replace conventional medical treatment.

TALK WITH YOUR HEALTH PROVIDER

- Consult your health care provider when considering a CAM to determine whether it may be beneficial. Depending on what type of therapy you are considering, it may be appropriate to discuss with your doctor, pharmacist, physiotherapist or nurse.
- Do not rely on an unproven product or therapy instead of seeing a health care provider. CAMs should be added to your overall pain management plan and should not replace medical care.

NATURAL DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN SAFE

- Sometimes people assume that if a product is natural, it is safe. Natural products can cause harm and need to be used with caution.

SAFETY WHEN CONSIDERING SUPPLEMENTS OR VITAMINS

Some supplements can help manage chronic pain. For example, there is some evidence that suggests some types of supplements may be helpful to people with pain if they are lacking those nutrients in their diet. It is very important to be careful when considering taking supplements or vitamins though as too much can be harmful.

Steps to supplement/vitamin safety:

- Let your health care provider know if you are already taking any supplements. It's best to consult with your doctor before you start taking any new supplements.
- Know that supplements/vitamins can interact with prescription and over-the-counter medications so be sure to tell your pharmacist if you're taking any supplements.
- Some chronic illnesses (e.g., diabetes, kidney disease) can increase the risk of side-effects from supplements/ vitamins.

CHECK THE INFORMATION

Unfortunately, some therapies out there are scams. If you are unsure about a therapy, here are some things to check:

1. Are there any “red flags”?
 - Claims that are too good to be true: No therapy will ever cure all pain for all people.
 - It has no listed side-effects: All treatments have some sort of side effect, even if just minor.
2. Ask a health care provider.
3. Check the Better Business Bureau to see if the company or therapy service has any complaints lodged against it: www.bbb.org
4. Check a reputable independent source online.

RESOURCES

- [LivePlanBe section on complementary therapies](#)
- Check out the [Pain Waves podcast](#) for a number of episodes on various complementary therapies
- [Considering complementary approaches](#)
- [Minding your body: Interoceptive awareness, mindfulness and living well](#)
- [Medline Plus drug information](#)
- [National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](#)