

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 101

April 2012

Complementary and Integrative Medicine

Complementary and integrative medicine, also called complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to a wide array of health care practices not currently considered to be part of mainstream medicine. Widespread use of CAM for various conditions requires that families, patients and health care professionals have a basic understanding of CAM.

Definitions:

- **Conventional/Western Medicine**
Medical care in systems based on the laws of science and the application of the scientific method.
- **Complementary Medicine**
Non-conventional, healing practices used in conjunction with conventional/traditional medicine practices.
- **Integrative Medicine**
A new medical specialty focused on the use of evidenced based treatments that combine aspects of CAM and conventional medicine.

Basic Philosophies Include:

- **Prevention is key to good health.** Taking steps to improve your health *before* you get sick is the best way to maintain health. A healthy lifestyle that promotes a balanced diet, regular exercise and proper sleep creates the best foundation for wellness.
- **Your body has the ability to heal itself.** Alternative medicine practitioners help your body to do its own healing via natural healing processes.
- **Learning and healing go hand in hand.** Alternative medicine practitioners emphasize a healing partnership as a key part of the healing process.
- **Holistic Care.** The focus is on recognizing your physical health, mental well-being, relationships and spiritual needs are interconnected.

Complementary and Integrative Medicine and Children:

A wide range of therapies are used in children including herbs, dietary supplements, massage, acupuncture, naturopathy and homeopathy.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reports that families use CAM in 20-40 percent of healthy children and in over 50 percent of children with chronic, recurrent and incurable illnesses. Despite this high rate of CAM usage families frequently do not inform their healthcare providers of what treatments they are using. Some groups of children are more likely to use CAM than others. Parents who use CAM are more likely to treat their children with it. Children with chronic disabling or recurrent conditions are among those who have higher CAM use.

CAM usage by families where children have mental health diagnoses is widespread. Studies have suggested CAM usage at nearly 50 percent of children with autism and 20 percent of children with ADHD. Unfortunately, psychiatrists are informed of CAM usage less than 50 percent of the time.

Tips for Youth and Family:

- Few high quality studies have examined how CAM therapies may affect young people. Results from studies in adults do not necessarily apply to children. Children and adolescents' immune and central nervous systems are not fully developed which can make them respond to treatments differently than adults.
- If you are considering an alternative approach educate yourself about its risks and benefits. Find out what conditions the therapy helps and which conditions it might worsen.
- Herbs and supplements may interact with medicines or other supplements.
- A substance that is natural may not necessarily be safe.
- Herbs and supplements are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. The preparations can differ a great deal from brand to brand.
- It is important to discuss CAM with your health care provider. All healthcare providers working with your child should be fully informed of all the treatments that your child is utilizing or considering. Supplements and herbal medications may interact with your prescription medications.
- Herbs and supplements should not be thought of as a substitute for healthy eating. The benefits of the nutrients you get through foods in your diet are not necessarily reproducible in a supplement. Proper diet, sleep and exercise are fundamental for children's well-being and are necessary to get the greatest benefit from any treatment.

When seeking care from a CAM practitioner, as with any healthcare provider, it is important to ask about the practitioner's:

- Education and training
- Training and experience in assessing and treating mental health conditions in youth
- Collaboration with other providers including physicians and other healthcare professionals
- Licensing (some states have licensing requirements for certain CAM practitioners)

Additional Information Can be Obtained from:

[The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine and the National Institution of Health \(NCCAM\).](#)

[Consortium of Academic Health Centers in Integrative Medicine \(CAHCIM\)](#)
[Consumer Labs](#)

For more information see *Facts for Families*:

[#6 Children Who Can't Pay Attention](#)

[#11 The Child with Autism](#)

[#21 Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents Part I: How Medications Are Used](#)

[#29 Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents Part II: Types of Medications](#)

[#51 Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents Part III: Questions to Ask](#)

If you find *Facts for Families*[®] helpful and would like to make good mental health a reality, consider donating to the [Campaign for America's Kids](#). Your support will help us continue to produce and distribute Facts for Families, as well as other vital mental health information, free of charge.

You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to *Campaign for America's Kids*, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families© information sheets are developed, owned and distributed by AACAP. Hard copies of **Facts** sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale or profit. All **Facts** can be viewed and printed from the AACAP website (www.aacap.org). **Facts** sheets may not be reproduced, duplicated or posted on any other website without written consent from AACAP. Organizations are permitted to create links to AACAP's website and specific **Facts** sheets. For all questions please contact the AACAP Communications & Marketing Coordinator, ext. 154.

If you need immediate assistance, please dial 911.

Copyright © 2012 by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.