

# COMPLEMENTARY & ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM)

NOLENSVILLE FAMILY MEDICINE  
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## BASIC INFORMATION

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered part of conventional medicine. Some scientific evidence exists about certain CAM therapies. For most, there are questions about whether they are safe and whether they work for the diseases or medical conditions for which they are used.

### DEFINITIONS

#### • Conventional:

Conventional medicine is medicine as practiced by holders of M.D. (medical doctor) or D.O. (doctor of osteopathy) degrees, and by other health professionals, such as physical therapists, psychologists, and registered nurses. Other terms for conventional medicine include allopathy; Western, mainstream, orthodox, and regular medicine; and biomedicine. Some conventional medical practitioners are also practitioners of CAM.

#### • Complementary:

Complementary medicine is used together with conventional medicine. An example of a complementary therapy is using aromatherapy to help lessen a patient's discomfort following surgery.

#### • Alternative:

Alternative medicine is used in place of conventional medicine. An example of an alternative therapy is using a special diet to treat cancer instead of undergoing surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy that has been recommended by a medical doctor.

#### • Integrative:

Integrative medicine combines mainstream medical therapies and CAM therapies for which there is some high-quality scientific evidence of safety and effectiveness.

### CATEGORIES OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

#### • Alternative medical systems

Alternative medical systems are built upon complete systems of theory and practice. Often, these systems have evolved apart from and earlier than the conventional medical approach used in the United States. Examples of alternative medical systems that have developed in Western cultures include homeopathic medicine and naturopathic medicine. Examples of systems that have developed in non-Western cultures include traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda.

#### • Mind-body interventions

Mind-body medicine uses a variety of techniques designed to enhance the mind's capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms. Some techniques that were considered CAM in the past have become mainstream (for example, patient support groups and cognitive-behavioral therapy). Other mind-body techniques are still considered CAM, including meditation, prayer, mental healing, and therapies that use creative outlets such as art, music, or dance.

#### • Biologically based therapies

Biologically based therapies in CAM use substances found in nature, such as herbs, foods, and vitamins. Some examples include dietary supplements, herbal products, and the use of other so-called "natural" yet scientifically unproven therapies (for example, using shark cartilage to treat cancer).

#### • Manipulative and body-based methods

Manipulative and body-based methods in CAM are based on manipulation and/or movement of one or more parts of the body. Some examples include chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation, and massage.

#### • Energy therapies (involve the use of energy fields). They are of two types:

- Biofield therapies are intended to affect energy fields that are thought to surround and penetrate the human body. The existence of such fields has not yet been scientifically proven. Some forms of energy therapy manipulate biofields by applying pressure and/or manipulating the body by placing the hands in, or through, these fields. Examples include qi gong, Reiki, and Therapeutic Touch.

- Bioelectromagnetic-based therapies involve the unconventional use of electromagnetic fields, such as pulsed fields, magnetic fields, or alternating current or direct current fields.

• To learn more: National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 7923, Gaithersburg, MD 20898; (888) 644-6226; website: [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov).



### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You have questions about complementary or alternative medicine.

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Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page