

## Contact Us at 1.866.208.3430 **Complementary & Alternative Therapy**

### **Education**

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) describes various interventions that are not considered a part of conventional medicine. This can include exercise, dietary supplements, acupuncture, and stress management strategies among others. When used in combination with conventional therapies they are referred to as complementary. When used instead of conventional therapies they are considered alternative therapy. Approximately 75% of MS patients in the United States utilize CAM in some form, usually in addition to conventional treatments.

### **Safety of CAM Therapies**

Many people may use CAM with the belief that everything sold over-the-counter is healthy and safe. Unlike conventional therapies, CAM do not undergo rigorous scientific study to determine safety and efficacy. Some examples of CAM may be completely harmless, whereas others may pose a significant risk of harm. Examples of ways CAM therapies could be detrimental are by producing serious side effects, or interacting negatively with other medications. Efforts to find ways to evaluate various CAM therapies for safety and efficacy are being ramped up.

### **The Importance of Controlled Clinical Studies**

Before health care professionals can recommend a therapy they need to know that it is safe and provides a benefit to the patient. The best way to determine safety and efficacy is through running a carefully designed clinical trial. Clinical trials are very important for making recommendations for several reasons:

- MS is a highly variable disease, with great differences between how it affects patients. Because of this, therapies need to be tested in a controlled setting with a large group of patients.
- Most people will have an initial positive response to any new treatment. We know this as the placebo effect. The effectiveness of any new treatment must be proven to be greater than that of a placebo.
- The risk of side effects requires that the therapy be tested in a large and varied patient group in order to discover any side effects the therapy may present.

### **Aspects to Consider Before Beginning CAM**

Ask the following questions before starting a therapy:

- What is involved in the treatment?
- How does the therapy help in MS?
- Is it effective?
- What potential risks are there?
- What is the cost?

Asking these questions will allow a person considering CAM to weigh the risks and benefits of therapy.

**For questions or concerns regarding any of the above statements or recommendations, please feel free to contact Diplomat Specialty Pharmacy Toll Free at 1.866.208.3430.**

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***If You Choose to Start a CAM Therapy***

(continued)

- Keep your physician and pharmacy up to date on everything you are using. This information is important for helping health professionals make the right recommendations for your care by allowing them to accurately screen for possible side effects and interactions.
- Do not discontinue conventional therapies. Your doctor prescribes treatments based on evidence from controlled trials and the experience of the MS medical community. Talk with your doctor about any changes you wish to make in your therapy before enacting them.
- Keep a log of your experience with a new therapy. Use a form to track your prescription and OTC medication use.

***Complementary Approaches to Physical and Emotional Well-Being***

- Food and Diet: No specific diet has been shown to have added benefit. Patients with MS should eat the same balanced healthy diet that is recommended for all adults
- Exercise: Exercise is well known to provide many benefits in all adults, and it helps MS patients even more. Aerobic exercise improves overall health, and can reduce various symptoms of MS including fatigue, bladder and bowel function, strength, and mood. Stretching helps with stiffness and can increase mobility.
- Stress management: Stress brings us down in general. Finding stress management strategies that work for you will go a long ways in improving overall health.

***Complementary Therapies to Avoid***

Removal of dental fillings: There is no scientific evidence supporting a benefit from removal of dental fillings containing mercury. Mercury poisoning of the nervous system works by a different mechanism than the process of degradation in MS.

Bee-sting therapy: A six month study in MS patients showed no reduction in disease activity, disability, or fatigue, and no improvement in quality of life.

***Information on Cannabis (marijuana)***

Based on studies up to now, and the known serious side effects of long-term cannabis use, the National MS Society's advisory board advises that there is insufficient data to recommend marijuana or its derivatives to treat symptoms of MS.

Research is continuing to determine if cannabis or its chemical derivatives provide benefit in reducing symptoms of spasticity and pain.

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