



Complementary Therapies

Things to consider before starting Complementary Therapies

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“Complementary therapies” refer to a broad group of natural healing methods and approaches that are different than the conventional western medicine (or pharmaceutical medicine). Many of these healing methods have been used for centuries in many different cultures.

Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, a wide variety of complementary therapies have been used by people with HIV for various purposes including general health promotion, relief of symptoms and cure of certain ailments. These include Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupuncture, ayurveda, aromatherapy, homeopathy, massage, meditation, naturopathy, Reiki, reflexology and many others.

How does “western medicine” differ from “complementary therapies”?

- Western medicine tends to focus on the external factors that cause the symptoms of the disease, while complementary therapies focus on the balance of the body’s internal energies.
- Western medicine focuses on treating the diseases, while complementary therapies focus on restoring balance between the physical, mental, social, spiritual well being of the person.
- In western medicine, drugs and other forms of treatment are tested in clinical trials before approved for use. Many of the complementary therapy practices are not clinically tested, but are learned from centuries of practice experience.

What should I consider before using complementary therapies?

- Learn about a treatment before you use it:

Get information about the form of complementary therapy you are interested in using. You can get information from different complementary therapy professional associations, AIDS service organizations or different forms of media. More importantly, talk to other people with HIV who have used the treatment, learn about its advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits, costs and results of the treatments.

- Find a knowledgeable and sensitive complementary therapist:

Find out whether the kind of therapy you are interested in is regulated by a professional body or government. Check if your therapist has the necessary training and qualification to practice.

If the therapy you are using is not regulated, then it is even more important to research about the experiences and results of other patients who have used the service. Make a list of questions you may have regarding the therapy, its risks and benefits, length of treatments, costs and expected results and ask your therapist to explain these to you at your first session.

Just as many western doctors are not experienced in treating HIV diseases, many complementary therapists may also lack the expertise to treat HIV related conditions. Find a therapist that has special training or experience working with people with HIV/AIDS.



- Be clear and careful about the costs:

Since many forms of complementary therapies are not covered by public or private insurance, it is important to ask your therapist to give you clear estimate of the costs involved in the treatments.

Sometimes your local AIDS service organizations may have complementary therapists providing voluntary or reduced cost services to people with HIV/AIDS, ask about these services at your local AIDS service organizations.

- Tell your caregivers about all the treatments you are using:

Complementary therapies and western medicine do not necessarily replace each other, in fact, often they support, or “complement” each other.

It is important to tell both your western medical care provider and complementary therapists about all the different kinds of treatments you are using.

This will help them get a more complete picture of your treatment plan in order to maximize the benefits of the treatments and to prevent any harmful side effects or interactions between the treatments.

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