

Complementary and Alternative Medicine



What is Complementary and Alternative Medicine?

These two words cover a lot; anything from herbal supplements to breathing techniques. In general, they mean anything that falls outside of the guidelines of western medicine to treat a disease. Complementary Medicines are “along with” the usual treatments and Alternative Medicines are “instead of” them.

Why do people use Complementary and Alternative Medicine?

Some people worry about drugs and do not fully trust modern healthcare. Some people may think natural herbs and medicines are safer. We can help you research if you are interested in Complementary Medicine to help with side effects, but know that there is NO alternative to FDA-approved medicines to treat HIV

Are they safer?

No. Remember that if you take anything and it has an effect on your body, it's a drug! For example, St. John's wort is a *natural* herbal supplement but it has interactions with a LOT of prescription medications. Just because it is natural does not mean it is safe -- many poisons are natural! The truth is, these complementary medicines aren't studied as much as prescription medications, so there is less information about them. That means we can't be as sure in saying that they work and we can't be as sure in saying they are safe.

Also, there are less regulations with herbal supplements and vitamins, so it is hard to be sure what you're actually getting in the bottle.

What about vitamins?

Vitamins can help, but if your levels are not low, you might not need them. Some can even lower the activity of HIV medications. This is why it is important to talk to your healthcare team about anything you are thinking about taking. Your doctor may even be able to write a prescription for it so it can be covered by your insurance!

What is the most important thing to know about Complementary and Alternative Medicine?

No alternative medicine can replace your prescription to treat HIV, but talk to your healthcare team if you are interested in complementary medicine! We can help make sure you are getting good information and maybe even help get it paid for.

connect @metrohealthcle



MyChart
metrohealth.org/mychart