

# health talk

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## Defining Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

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### What is CAM?

CAM consists of a wide range of treatments and products, from massage to exercise to COQ10. Only therapies that are proven to be safe and effective are used by naturopathic doctors.

### The Rising Use of CAM

A Fraser Institute survey found that 73% of Canadians had used at least one alternative therapy at some point in their lives (1997). The total sum of money spent on CAM was shown to be \$3.8 billion.

Survey results indicated that the 10 most common alternative therapies used in Canada were: acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic, energy healing, folk remedies, herbal therapies, massage, prayer, relaxation techniques, and yoga.

The 10 most common medical conditions in which people used CAM for was also reported: back or neck problems, allergies, arthritis or rheumatism, difficulty walking, frequent headaches, lung problems, digestive problems, gynaecological problems, anxiety attacks, heart problems or chest pain. Not included on that list as significantly high users of CAM are people with cancer. It has been estimated that 80% of adult cancer patients use at least one form of CAM during or after treatment (Journal of Psychosocial Oncology 2006; 23(4): 35-60)

### Qualities of CAM Healthcare

1. CAM offers new ideas and approaches that have proven effective during treatment
2. CAM approaches health in a holistic way
3. CAM therapies focus on wellness rather than sickness, thereby placing great emphasis on the field of preventive medicine
4. The CAM approach focuses on the patient's innate healing abilities first; the disease second

### Is there Evidence?

One recent study clearly showed the benefits of acupuncture in knee problems. In the very active field of cancer research, studies show support

in using CAM to increase well-being, alleviate cancer symptoms, and reduce the adverse effects of conventional treatment. A very promising clinical trial now under way conducted by the B.C. Cancer Agency, is demonstrating that an herbal formula can reverse the growth of pre-cancerous lesions in the lung.

### Synergism in CAM

Research has also been exploring the synergistic effects of healing in integrative models of care. That is, results recognise that many CAM therapies work using multiple systems of care; they are not single component interventions but protocols which are defined by individualized "packages" of care, focusing on holistic methods rather than reductionist. Positive outcomes occur via multi-causal pathways rather than one or two static and limited mechanisms.

### The Importance of CAM

From green tea to Vitamin D, exercise to meditation, whether at home or at the workplace, Canadians are adopting CAM as their primary choice in living a healthy and fit life. Therapies in North America during the 70's and 80's that were once considered unconventional have continually emerged to become new and important approaches on the conventional medical scene.

