

Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Prostate Cancer



With the increasing popularity of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) over the recent years, many people are either considering or are already using these alternative therapies to treat their disease. It is estimated that approximately 50% of people living in Western countries have turned to CAM. More specifically, studies have found that the prevalence of use of CAM in men with prostate cancer is about 1/3.

What is CAM?

CAM stands for complementary and alternative medicine, and includes products, practices and other types of healthcare that is not part of conventional Western medicine, i.e. medical doctors, doctor of osteopathy, physical therapists, psychologists, and registered nurses. It is important to understand that complementary and alternative medicine are two separate types of therapeutic methods: complementary medicine is used in conjunction with, whereas alternative medicine is used as a substitute for Western medicine to treat diseases or symptoms. Some CAM includes, but are not limited to nutritional and herbal supplements (diets, herbal products, vitamins and minerals, amino acids), stress reduction (yoga, meditation), aromatherapy, homeopathy, exercise, and acupuncture.

What are some types of CAM used for the treatment of prostate cancer?

Although CAM has and is being used for prostate cancer, there have not been any established evidence-based medicine. In addition, products that have been approved for prostate-related diseases (e.g prostatitis) may not be approved for prostate cancer. For example, some CAM commonly used in prostate cancer include: PC-SPES (an herbal product), selenium, soy products, Vitamin E, saw palmetto, self-help groups, prayer and spiritual healing techniques, green tea and acupuncture. Although some of these therapies have been effective in treating certain conditions, it may not be effective for everyone. For example, although Vitamin E was found to be beneficial in smokers, and men who were deficient, it was not found to be beneficial for all other men. Thus, it is important that you become informed about the product you are using or are considering using.

Reasons for CAM use

People turn to CAM for a variety of reasons including the perception that “natural is good”, because the medical explanations provided by the CAM practitioner is in-line with the patient’s belief of their condition, dissatisfaction with conventional practitioners, and adverse effects of traditional treatment.

CAM is most commonly used for conditions that involve chronic or recurring pain such as back, head, joint pain, colds, GI disorders, and sleeping problems. People also report using CAM because they believe that if they used it in conjunction with conventional medicine, it would be beneficial, it would be interesting to try, conventional medicine/treatment was unsuccessful, or because their doctor suggested/recommended trying it.

What are the risks of using CAM?

It is very important to understand that there may be risks regarding the usage of these therapies. For example, because many CAM providers are not medical doctors, your condition may be misdiagnosed or the progression of the disease may be underestimated. In addition, drug-nutrient interactions can be a significant concern. If you are thinking about using CAM, you should talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or dietitian, to reduce the risk of drug-nutrient interactions, and other complications. Furthermore, seeing your doctor can better ensure that you are getting a proper diagnosis and/or treatment for your condition.

Things to consider before using CAM

If you are considering turning to CAM, it is important to make sure you are informed. With the wide accessibility of information on the internet, you must ensure that you are getting your information from a reliable source. Some things to look at include: Who runs and pays for the site? Where does the information come from? How current is the information? How is the information selected?

Here are some questions you should ask yourself about any and all CAM: Is it safe and effective (evidence)? Does it interact with the medication you are taking? With regards to the practitioner, here are some things to consider: Is the practitioner qualified and have the required credentials; where did they receive their training (ask for a referral by your healthcare provider)? Are the services covered by insurance? Then, once you make an appointment with a CAM provider, consider how you feel about him or her - were your questions answered adequately? Does the suggested treatment sound reasonable or extreme? How were you treated? The key here is to make sure you are making an informed decision.

Resources

Please refer to our website, www.prostatecentre.com, for a list of useful websites on CAM and Cancer. The document is called: Complementary & Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Cancer: How to make and support safe and informed decisions.

The Prostate Education & Research Centre



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Visit The Prostate Centre on the World Wide Web:

www.prostatecentre.com