

# TIME TO TALK.



Ask



Tell

Patients and their health care providers need to talk openly about all of their health care practices. This includes the use of complementary health practices.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at the National Institutes of Health has launched an educational campaign—Time to Talk—to encourage discussion of the use of complementary health practices. As the Federal Government’s lead agency for scientific research on complementary health practices, NCCAM is committed to providing objective, evidence-based information on complementary health practices to help health professionals and the public make informed health care decisions.

## Why Talk?

To ensure safe, coordinated care, it’s time to talk. Talking not only allows fully integrated care, but it also minimizes risks of interactions among a patient’s treatments. When patients tell their providers about their use of complementary health practices, they can better stay in control and more effectively manage their health. When providers ask their patients about the use of complementary health practices, they can ensure that they are fully informed and can help patients make informed health care decisions.

In a nationwide Government survey, 38 percent of all adults aged 18 or older, and nearly 12 percent of children aged 17 years and younger, use some form of complementary health practice. Patients with chronic and acute medical conditions turn to complementary health practices in large numbers—most frequently to treat pain (including back, neck, or joint pain; arthritis; or other musculoskeletal conditions), as well as anxiety, cholesterol, head or chest colds, and other medical conditions.<sup>1</sup> People also use complementary health practices to promote health and well-being. However, many people don’t discuss their use of complementary health practices with their health care providers. Some people don’t know that they should, or say that their provider has never asked.<sup>2</sup>

**Complementary health practices are defined as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products whose origins come from outside mainstream medicine. They include products and practices such as herbal supplements, meditation, spinal manipulation, and acupuncture.**

## Tips to Start Talking

### Patient Tips for Discussing Complementary Health Practices With Providers

- When completing patient history forms, be sure to include all therapies and treatments you use. Make a list in advance.
- Tell your health care providers about all therapies or treatments—including over-the-counter and prescription medicines, as well as herbal and dietary supplements.
- Take control. Don’t wait for your providers to ask about your use of complementary health practices.
- If you are considering using a complementary health practice, ask your health care providers about its safety, effectiveness, and possible interactions with medications (both prescription and over-the-counter).

<sup>1</sup> Barnes PM, Bloom B, Nahin RL. Complementary and alternative medicine use among adults and children: United States, 2007. *CDC National Health Statistics Report #12*. 2008.

<sup>2</sup> AARP, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. *Complementary and Alternative Medicine. What People Aged 50 and Older Discuss With Their Health Care Providers*. Consumer Survey Report; 2011.

### Provider Tips for Discussing Complementary Health Practices With Patients

- Include a question about the use of complementary health practices on medical history forms.
- Ask your patients to bring a list of all the therapies they use, including prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal supplements and other complementary health practices.
- Actively distribute *Time to Talk* materials to patients.

### We Have Materials That Can Help

The *Time to Talk* materials include fact sheets for both patients and providers, explaining why it's important to discuss the use of complementary health practices, and how to start talking. There is a wallet card to help patients easily record their medical conditions and all medications, including dietary supplements and other complementary health products.

All these materials are available FREE to health care providers and patients by visiting the NCCAM Web site at [nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk](http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk).

## Resources

### National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

[nccam.nih.gov](http://nccam.nih.gov)

### MedlinePlus—Complementary and Alternative Medicine

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/complementaryandalternativemedicine.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/complementaryandalternativemedicine.html)

### MedlinePlus—Dietary Supplements

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dietarysupplements.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dietarysupplements.html)

### National Institutes of Health—Office of Dietary Supplements

[ods.od.nih.gov](http://ods.od.nih.gov)

### National Cancer Institute—Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine

[www.cancer.gov/cam](http://www.cancer.gov/cam)

### National Institute on Aging—Age Page on Dietary Supplements

[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/dietary-supplements](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/dietary-supplements)

*NCCAM's mission is to define, through rigorous scientific investigation, the usefulness and safety of complementary and alternative medicine interventions and their roles in improving health and health care. For additional information, call NCCAM's Clearinghouse toll free at 1-888-644-6226, or visit the NCCAM Web site at [nccam.nih.gov](http://nccam.nih.gov).*

*The National Institutes of Health (NIH)—the Nation's medical research agency—includes 27 institutes and centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).*



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