Osteoarthritis

CHOOSING A COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY

Effective Date: September 15, 2008

Complementary therapies are activities or supplements that are added to or used as an alternative to medical care. Generally, they have not been validated by quality scientific research so the risks and any benefits are not clear. The use of complementary therapy is not endorsed. This guide is provided for your information. It is a guide about questions to ask and precautions to take if you are considering the use of a complementary therapy.

Complementary therapies include a wide range of treatments such as:

- dietary changes;
- vitamins, minerals, herbal supplements, etc.;
- techniques such as relaxation, visualization, meditation; and
- magnets, massage, therapeutic touch, etc.

What should I consider before starting?

Before starting, make sure that you are already eating healthy food, exercising regularly and following the advice of your health care providers. Nutrients from food sources are absorbed best so improve your diet before adding dietary supplements.

1. Have a specific goal when trying a new therapy.

Know the specific action and benefit you are trying to achieve and the timeline.

2. Do your research first.

- a. Use reliable Internet resources, such as university, government or non-profit agency websites (e.g. The Arthritis Society).
- b. Use reliable books or written publications/journals.
- c. Ask questions.
 - Is the evidence offered convincing to the general scientific/medical community? If not, why not?
 - How much, how often and how long is necessary to get benefit?
 - · How much will the consultations, procedures, and supplements cost?
 - Does it interact with other medications/supplements or therapies?
 - · What are the possible risks and side effects?
 - · Will it interfere with other medical conditions?
 - Is this therapy accepted by the broad medical community?







3. Inform your health care providers.

- a. Begin by discussing options with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, physiotherapist, etc.
- b. Tell your health care providers about all complementary therapies you are using.
- c. Provide a list of all current medications, supplements and therapies that you are taking or are not taking that were prescribed.
- d. Inform your health care provider of any prescribed therapies you are not using.

4. Use only health products that have proper certification.

Products with a DIN (Drug Identification Number) have been supported by good-quality studies for safety and effectiveness. Products with a NPN (Natural Health Product Number), USP number (US Pharmacopeia), or Consumers Lab logo, or NSF™ international certification may ensure quality but do not ensure effectiveness.

5. Take the same precaution you would with conventional medicine.

Supplements should be treated as drugs. They may have side effects.

6. Try only one new therapy at a time and assess benefit.

Continue the therapy only if it works, with no side effects, and is affordable.

7. Before surgery, stop dietary/herbal supplements for several weeks.

Many supplements have biological effects (such as increased bleeding) that interact with medicines used during or after the operation. Provide a list of all current medications, supplements and therapies to your health care providers.

Resources (also see the Patient Guide: A Guide for People Living with Osteoarthritis)

- Arthritis Today Supplement Guide (updated every 1–2 years)
- The Arthritis Foundation's Guide to Alternative Therapies. Horstman, J. (1999)
- Mayo Clinic on Chronic Pain, New York: Kensington. Swanson, DW, (1999).
- www.nccam.nih.gov (National Centre for Complementary & Alternative Medicine)
- http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov/ (Office of Dietary Supplements)
- www.mayoclinic.com
- www.canadian-health-network.ca
- www.quackwatch.org