

## Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Some women with breast cancer use *complementary and alternative medicine* (CAM):

- An approach is generally called complementary medicine when it is used along with standard treatment.
- An approach is called alternative medicine when it is used instead of standard treatment.

You may want to ask the doctor these questions before you decide to use CAM:

- What benefits can I expect from this approach?
- What are its risks?
- Do the expected benefits outweigh the risks?
- What side effects should I watch for?
- Will the approach change the way my cancer treatment works? Could this be harmful?
- Is this approach under study in a clinical trial? If so, who sponsors the trial?
- Will my health insurance pay for this approach?

*Acupuncture*, massage therapy, herbal products, vitamins or special diets, visualization, meditation, and spiritual healing are types of CAM.

Many women say that CAM helps them feel better. However, some types of CAM may change the way standard treatment works. These changes could be harmful. And some types of CAM could be harmful even if used alone.

Some types of CAM are expensive. Health insurance may not cover the cost.

NCI offers a booklet called *Thinking About Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Guide for People with Cancer*.

You also may request materials from the Federal Government's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. You can reach their clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226 (voice) and 1-866-464-3615 (TTY). In addition, you can visit the Center's Web site at <http://www.nccam.nih.gov>, or send an email to [info@nccam.nih.gov](mailto:info@nccam.nih.gov).