

Complementary and Alternative Treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorder

DEFINITION

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine).

TYPES OF CAM

Dietary restriction of food allergens
IV Immunoglobulins
Antiviral agents
Gluten Free-Casein Free Diet
Yeast Free Diet
Vancomycin
Dietary Supplements (vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin B6, magnesium, folic acid, Vitamin B12, DMG, TMG, carnosine, omega 3 fatty acids, inositol)
Chelation
Digestive enzymes
Antifungal agents
Probiotics
Methyl B12 injections
Auditory Integration Therapy
Behavioral Optometry
Craniosacral Manipulation
Music therapy
Hippotherapy
Facilitated Communication

TIPS FOR CLINICIANS

Recognize many patients will use non-standard interventions for treatment of ASD symptoms
Become knowledgeable about CAM therapies
Inquire about previous and current CAM therapy use
Provide balanced, objective information about treatment options
Assist parents in identifying risks or potential harmful effects of therapy options
Assist parents in evaluating the evidence used to support all treatments for ASD
Maintain respect and open communication with parents
Continue to work with families even if there is disagreement about treatment choices
Critically evaluate the scientific merit of specific therapies and share this information with families
Remind families that due to scientific flaws, insufficient numbers of patients, or lack of replication, many CAM therapies have been inadequately evaluated and evidenced based recommendations for their use are not currently possible.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Also called integrative or holistic medicine
Research suggests that between 30 and 95 percent of children with ASD have received a complementary or alternative therapy
Parent surveys indicate that only 36 to 62 percent of caregivers who used CAM therapies for their child with autism informed their PCP

TALKING TO PARENTS ABOUT EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE FOR CAM

Peer reviewed studies
Well defined, homogeneous study populations
Randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled design
Adequate sample size to support statistical analysis presented
Use of appropriate, validated outcome measures

ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO SEEK ADDITIONAL INFORMATION WHEN...

Treatments are based on overly simplified scientific theories
Therapies claim to be effective for multiple, different, unrelated conditions or symptoms
Claims are made that children will respond dramatically or will be cured
Case reports or anecdotal data are used instead of carefully designed studies to support claims for treatment
There are lack of peer reviewed references
There is denial for the need of controlled studies
Treatments are said to have no potential or reported side effects