Alternative and Complementary Therapies: How Should We Handle Them?

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DISCLOSURE OF RELEVANT RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY

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I WANT TO BELIEVE
• A huge number of patients seek alternative treatments

• In one study, 227/444 patients with eczema (51%) reported use of one or more forms of alternative medicine

• Homeopathy, health food and herbal remedies were most common (Jensen)


10 most common complementary health approaches among adults—2012

- Natural Products*: 17.7%
- Deep Breathing: 10.9%
- Yoga, Tai Chi, or Qi Gong: 10.1%
- Chiropractic or Osteopathic Manipulation: 8.4%
- Meditation: 8.0%
- Massage: 6.9%
- Special Diets: 3.0%
- Homeopathy: 2.2%
- Progressive Relaxation: 2.1%
- Guided Imagery: 1.7%

Source: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

https://nccih.nih.gov
Why Alternative Medicine?

– When diseases are not curable
– When our explanations are unsatisfying
– When our treatments are felt to be unsafe or only “symptomatic”
Why not?

• When Western medicines work (and do so safely) there is less drive for alternatives

– Once the skin is under control, patients de-emphasize food allergens and diet

(Thompson and Hanifin)

The Listing Tree of Science

Figure 2. Depiction of how research into atopic dermatitis has been imbalanced by basic science in the past. Abbreviations: AD, atopic dermatitis; IgE, immunoglobulin E; and Th2, T helper 2 (Reproduced with permission by Cambridge University Press).³

Admiral Motti: “Your sad devotion to that ancient religion has not helped you conjure up the stolen data tapes, or given you clairvoyance enough to find the rebels' hidden fort—...”
1. There is a “why” behind the interest... and limits to our knowledge... Being open to it may signal kindess, strength, and wisdom
Steroid Phobia
Other Phobias...

- Topical Calcineurin Inhibitors
- Antibiotics
- Preservatives (e.g., parabens)
- “Chemicals”
- Etc., Etc...
Stories and Photos of RSS

RSS is a painful condition affecting individuals who use topical steroids for an underlying skin condition. It is not understood why some individuals develop RSS after using topical steroids and others do not.

What is understood is that RSS is a medical condition that affects thousands of people worldwide. Their suffering is undeniable. They hope that by sharing their stories they will shed light on this condition and help others avoid this excruciating experience.
Naturopathic Doctors Look Bad After California Woman Dies From Turmeric Injection

Britt Marie Hermes, CONTRIBUTOR

I cover medical pseudoscience as an ex-naturopath. FULL BIO

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.
Thought

2. Know the fears... crazy or not... Addressing them may be better than dismissal
What is Alternative/Complementary Medicine?

• If a non-mainstream practice is used *together* with conventional medicine, it’s considered “complementary.”

• If a non-mainstream practice is used *in place of* conventional medicine, it’s considered “alternative.”

https://nccih.nih.gov
What is Integrative Medicine?

- “There are many definitions of “integrative” health care, but all involve bringing conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way.”
What is Alternative/Complementary Medicine?

• Enormous catch-all term for everything from Kirlian photography to chicken soup

• Ranges from complex systems (e.g., TCM) to oversimplified “supplements”
What is Alternative/Complementary Medicine?

- Treatments that are simply not based on evidence
- Having not been tested sufficiently
- Having been tested and found not to work as claimed when studied in a controlled setting (e.g., borage oil)
Problems

• Enormous variety of systems and non-systems
• Anecdotal evidence overflowing
• Insufficient resources for proper studies
Approach

Balance, restore, strengthen, tonify >

“Attack”, “Kill”, “Cut out”, “Suppress”
Thought

4. Positive, supportive language and framing may be beneficial
Augenblick
Thought

4. “Holistic” sounds cheesy, but it’s what good doctors do
Sunflower Seed Oil

- Topical application of sunflower oil increases synthesis of ceramides and has direct emollient and barrier repair properties.
- It also has anti-inflammatory effects possibly via peroxisome proliferative-activated receptor-a (PPAR-a) activation.

**Figure 1.** Outcome of lichenification item (% compared to D0) after 7 and 21 days of treatment for group A (CT twice daily) and group E (CT 1 day/2 + emollient). Statistical analysis was performed comparing A to E according to data treatment described in Methods (*p < 0.1, **p < 0.01).
Sunflower Seed Oil

19 adults with AD used olive oil vs sunflower oil on opposite arms for 4 wks.

- Olive oil: Decreased stratum corneum integrity, increased TEWL, caused mild erythema.
- Sunflower seed oil: preserved SC integrity, improved hydration and caused no erythema.

Coconut

- Virgin coconut oil (same as “extra virgin”) is cold-pressed and uses no solvents
- 8% unsaturated fatty acids (vs 82% in virgin olive oil), especially “medium-chain fatty acids”
- Colorless and odorless, cosmetically elegant
Coconut

- Comparative study of VCO vs. mineral oil in 117 AD children (1-13 y/o; mild to moderate AD) for 8 wks
- 68% decrease in SCORAD with VCO vs. 38% with mineral oil

Coconut

- Topically applied coconut oil decreased staph colonization by 95% in patients with atopic dermatitis when applied twice daily for 4 weeks, vs. 50% decrease in olive oil control

- Strong evidence for broad-spectrum antibacterial activity

Thoughts

1. Being open to integrative medicine may signal kindness, strength, and wisdom
2. Reassurance of fears may be better than dismissal
3. It may be in our best interest to help guide this movement rather than simply reject it
4. A “holistic” approach to the patient is good medicine
Federman’s Rules

• Think out loud.
• Keep it simple.
• Be kind.
Thank you!