

Making Informed Decisions About The Use of Complementary and Alternative Nutrition in Pediatrics

This TelAbility handout will review some of the many different types of alternative nutrition treatments currently available and outlines questions you should ask when considering their use.

Frustrated by the lack of improvement they want to see from conventional medicines and/or worried about their side effects, as many as 60-70% of families who have children with special health care needs try nutritional supplements as an alternative or additional approach. Others may have heard of a supplement that offers a “cure” for their child’s condition and are eager to try it. But how can you make an informed decision about whether or not a treatment or product is useful, and most of all, safe?

What is the difference between complementary and alternative therapies?

Complementary Therapy- is used together with conventional medicine, while **Alternative Therapy** is used in place of conventional medicine.

How Can I Make Informed Decisions About the Use of These Treatments?

Use the checklist below to help determine if a product or treatment is a good option for your child.

- ✓ What short and long-term benefits should I expect to see from having this child use this product?
- ✓ Has any research been done to show this product is safe and effective for children?
- ✓ Are there any dangerous side effects?
- ✓ What is a safe dose for this child?
- ✓ Would using this treatment interfere with other medications or treatments this child is already receiving?
- ✓ Would using this product affect this child’s ability to eat, drink, play or learn?
- ✓ What is the cost? Will part or all of it be covered by insurance?
- ✓ How much time does the treatment take? Can it fit into the child’s and family’s daily schedule?

Where to Find Answers about Nutritional Therapies

Finding answers can sometimes be a very challenging task. It's important to remember that product literature (like the box or a brochure) should **not** be the only source of information evaluated before using it.

Even if a product is labeled as "gentle" or "safe", remember that the majority of products have not been tested on children. Finding appropriate doses can also be a challenge for this same reason.

There are some documented findings on certain herbs and supplements that report liver and heart complications when used. High doses of certain vitamins (especially the "fat soluble" vitamins A, D, E and K) can cause serious medical problems when given to a child over a period of time. Some treatments may be expensive or may only have anecdotal reports of success.

If you are interested in pursuing a nutritional supplement or treatment for your child and have answered the questions on this handout to your satisfaction, it is important to maintain open lines of communication with your health care team regarding the use of these treatments for your child. The product should be stopped immediately if any complications arise.

For more information on the use of complementary or alternative nutrition, contact your local pediatric nutritionist or Sharon Wallace at sharonwallace@nc.rr.com. **This handout last updated on 11/01/02**

Below is a list of references that can also help you make informed decisions about the use of these treatments.

References

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)
www.nccam.nih.gov

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