

More women turning to CAM for menopause without medical guidance

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The use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is increasing for the treatment of menopausal symptoms but often without the guidance of a clinician. That's according to a new study reported online today in *Menopause*, the journal of the North American Menopause Society (NAMS). As a result, the authors suggest that healthcare providers—in particular family medicine practitioners—need to be more aware of the various CAM therapies and take a more active role in guiding patients through their options to more safely and effectively coordinate their care.

Ongoing fear of the [potential risks](#) of hormone therapy is cited as a primary reason for the growing use of CAM among menopausal women (including pre-, peri- and postmenopausal) in recent decades. CAM is a general term for healthcare practices and products not associated with the conventional medical profession. Some of the more commonly accessed CAM practitioner groups include massage therapists, naturopaths/herbalists, chiropractors/osteopaths, and acupuncturists. The more popular self-prescribed CAM supplements/activities include vitamins/minerals, yoga/meditation, herbal medicines, aromatherapy oils and/or Chinese medicines.

Although there is still ongoing debate within the medical industry regarding the proven effectiveness of CAM alternatives, the point of this study was to confirm that most adults seeking treatment for their symptoms purchase CAM products or services without the guidance of a healthcare practitioner. It is estimated that 53 percent of menopausal women use at least one type of CAM for the management of such [menopause](#)-related symptoms as hot flashes, night sweats, anxiety, depression, stiff or painful joints, back pain, headaches, tiredness, vaginal discharge, leaking urine and palpitations.

This raises major safety concerns, according to the

authors, since much of the use of self-prescribed CAM products is done without a medical consultation. The greatest safety concern relates to the large percentage of [menopausal women](#) who typically use CAM products concurrently with conventional medicine but who may be unaware of the possible herb-drug interactions.

'There is still much to be learned in the CAM arena and women need to understand that just because something appears natural does not necessarily mean it is without risk, especially for certain populations,' says NAMS Medical Director Wulf Utian, M.D., Ph.D., D.Sc. 'In the meantime, this study does a good job of alerting clinicians to the growing interest in CAM alternatives and of the critical role of health providers in helping educate patients on the potential risks and benefits of all options.'

More information: The article, 'Longitudinal analysis of associations between women's consultations with complementary and alternative medicine practitioners/use of self-prescribed complementary and alternative medicine and menopause-related symptoms, 2007-2010' will be published in the January 2016 print edition of *Menopause*.

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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