

Complementary and Alternative Treatments for Children with ASD

WHAT IS COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM)?

- The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) defines “complementary” as a non-mainstream practice used together with conventional medicine and “alternative” medicine as a non-mainstream practice used in place of conventional medicine.

WHAT CAM THERAPIES HAVE BEEN TRIED IN CHILDREN WITH ASD?

- CAM therapies explored for symptomatic improvement in ASD can be broadly categorized into biologically-based and non-biologically based interventions.
 - ◆ Biologically-based interventions include dietary interventions (for example, elimination diets, vitamin supplements, and herbal remedies); chelation therapy; and hyperbaric oxygen therapy.
 - ◆ Non biologically-based CAM interventions include mind-body practices (for example, meditation, music therapy, yoga); manipulative and body-based treatments (for example, acupuncture); and energy medicine (homeopathy, Reiki).

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE EVIDENCE FOR CAM THERAPY IN THE CONTEXT OF ASD?

- There is a lack of high-quality research on complementary and alternative approaches to treat symptoms of ASD.
- Treatments such as hyperbaric oxygen therapy and chelation therapy have no scientific evidence supporting their use for ASD symptoms and the risks outweigh known benefits.
- CAM treatments are not recommended to be used in place of conventional treatments.

For more information on complementary and alternative treatments in the context of Autism Spectrum Disorders, visit the National Institutes of Health’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/autism>.