



Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Autism

What is Complementary and Alternative Medicine?

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) refers to treatment approaches that are not usually part of conventional medical care.

Is the use of CAM recommended in the management of children with autism?

There is inadequate evidence at present for most CAM to support their use in routine autism care. If CAM is used, it is important to note that it does not replace mainstream, evidence-based interventions for autism.

What is Autism?

- A lifelong neuro-developmental condition that can make it hard for a child to communicate with others, affecting their social skills.
- Several evidence-based treatments (e.g. behavioural intervention) are available for autism. These can help children on the autism spectrum to gain developmental skills over time.

Examples of CAM*:



CAM that **should not be used** as they have no evidence of treatment benefit and/ or have significant potential for harm:

- Antibiotics, antivirals, anti-helminth therapy
- Aromatherapy
- Chelation therapy
- Chiropractic, osteopathy
- Hyperbaric oxygen therapy
- Immunoglobulin therapy
- Stem cell therapy
- Vagal nerve stimulation



CAM that is **not recommended** due to insufficient evidence of treatment benefit with no/ low potential for harm:

- Acupuncture
- Supplements (e.g., amino acid, zinc, magnesium, coenzyme Q10, digestive enzymes, sulforaphane, minerals, omega-3 fatty acids, probiotics, vitamins including B12/B6)
- Special diets (e.g., gluten-free casein-free diet, ketogenic diet, camel milk)
- Massage
- Neurofeedback
- Transcranial direct current stimulation
- Animal assisted interventions
- Auditory integration therapy



CAM that **may be considered** for some children:

- Music therapy
- Visual motor exercises



*The table above is not exhaustive.



What should I do if I am considering CAM for my child?

- Discuss with your child's doctor about the risks and benefits associated with the specific CAM. Your doctor can then assess the suitability of CAM for your child.

Are there any foods or activities that are recommended for children with autism?

- A healthy and balanced diet which provides adequate nutrition for all children is recommended. As feeding difficulties is common for children on the spectrum (especially with limited food variety), it is recommended to seek professional advice from your child's doctor if your child is experiencing such difficulties.
- Engagement in a variety of physical activities at age-appropriate intensity and frequency, similar to the recommendation for all children.



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