



## Making Treatment Decisions

# American Cancer Society Operational Statement on Complementary and Alternative Methods of Cancer Management

*(Developed by the ACS Advisory Group on Complementary and Alternative Methods and reviewed by the ACS Medical Affairs Committee August 12, 1999. Reviewed by Harmon Eyre, MD, December 6, 2004.)*

The American Cancer Society realizes that there are many definitions for the terms "alternative" and "complementary" methods and makes the following distinction between these categories. Alternative methods are defined as unproved or disproved methods, rather than evidence-based or proven methods to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer. "Complementary" methods are defined as supportive methods used to complement evidence-based treatment. Complementary therapies do not replace mainstream cancer treatment and are not promoted to cure disease. Rather, they control symptoms and improve well being and quality of life. This distinction separates methods based on how they are promoted and used.

The American Cancer Society is sensitive to the growing public interest, in particular, those living with cancer, in information about alternative and complementary methods. The American Cancer Society acknowledges that more research is needed regarding the safety and effectiveness of many of these methods. The American Cancer Society advocates for peer-reviewed scientific evidence of the safety and efficacy of these methods. All cancer interventions must withstand the scrutiny of peer-reviewed scientific evaluation before they can be recommended for the prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of cancer.

The American Cancer Society realizes the need to balance access to alternative and complementary therapies while protecting patients against methods that might be harmful to them. The American Cancer Society supports patient access, but strongly encourages more oversight and accountability by governmental, public, and private entities to protect the public from harm as they seek therapies to complement mainstream cancer care. Harmful drug interactions may occur and must be recognized. Unnecessary delays and interruptions in standard therapies are detrimental to the success of cancer treatment.

The American Cancer Society supports the right of individuals with cancer to decide what treatment is best for them. But we encourage people to discuss all treatments they may be considering with their physician and other health care providers. We also encourage people with cancer to consider using methods that have been proved effective or those that are currently under study in clinical trials. We also encourage health care professionals to ask their patients about their use of alternative and complementary methods. Health care professionals should listen and know how to communicate with their patients. Open, trusting, non-critical dialogue is essential in this important area.