



braintumour  
foundation

OF CANADA

# Ask the Expert Information Sheet

## Complementary & Alternative Medicine

Provided by Dr. Lynda Balneaves, CAMEO Research Program, BC Cancer Agency

**Additional support, information and education offered by Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada:**

Adult, Pediatric and Non-Malignant Brain Tumour Handbook available in English and French

“A Friend in Hope” children’s storybook available in English and French

20+ Adult Support Groups across Canada (in-person and virtual)

Toll-free information and support line

BrainWAVE Pediatric Support Program

Print BrainStorm Newsletter  
Email Newsletters:  
• E-BrainStorm  
• Peace of Mind

“Grey Matters” Blog

**All patient resources are available free-of-charge in Canada. Call 1-800-265-5106 or visit [www.BrainTumour.ca](http://www.BrainTumour.ca) for additional details and information.**

### “Is there anything I can do to help me live with and survive my brain tumour?”

This is a question heard repeatedly from individuals visiting the Complementary Medicine Education and Outcomes (CAMEO) research program at the BC Cancer Agency. A growing number of Canadians living with a brain tumour are turning towards complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) to treat their symptoms and disease, improve their quality of life, and gain hope. Complementary therapies are treatments not typically recommended as part of conventional care and are used alongside medical treatments. Alternative therapies are treatments used as a replacement for conventional medical therapy.

A variety of CAM therapies have been reported by individuals with brain tumours, including natural health products (e.g., vitamins), mind-body therapies (e.g., meditation), and energy therapies (e.g., acupuncture). Most of the current research on CAM and brain tumours has focused on therapies useful in managing symptoms, including acupuncture for nausea and hypnosis for pain and anxiety. Less research has been conducted on natural health products popular with the brain tumour community, making treatment and safety recommendations difficult.

As the interest in CAM has grown, there has been an increasing need for services and education that will help individuals with brain tumours and health professionals make safe and informed decisions about CAM. While some CAM therapies may be beneficial in managing symptoms and improving quality of life, other therapies may be potentially harmful. For example, natural health products may interact with conventional treatments, cause allergic reactions, or trigger changes in important body functions, such as blood clotting and blood sugar regulation. As a result, it is essential to discuss CAM use with a trusted health care provider knowledgeable about your illness and treatment. Getting informed is also a vital step in making decisions about CAM. A growing body of credible databases (see Useful Links under [www.bccancer.bc.ca/cameo](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/cameo)) now exists that can help you answer critical questions about a CAM therapy, including “Is it safe?,” “Does it work?,” and “Are there any side effects?” It is also important to acknowledge the beliefs and values that may influence your treatment decisions, as well as how family and friends may be helpful during the decision-making process.

The hope and support offered by CAM therapies is important to acknowledge, as is the need to stay current as the research on CAM and brain tumours continues to develop. Being a savvy CAM consumer and sharing your CAM decisions with your health care team will ensure you stay safe and get the most out of your treatment plan!

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