



## How to be a Better Consumer of Alternative Medicine Services

Although alternative medicine services have been used to prevent and treat disease for thousands of years, established training and practice programs are few in the U.S. Because of this, making informed decisions about which alternative modality or practitioner to choose can be difficult. The seven guidelines below can help you become a better consumer of these services.

- 1. Learn the general principles of alternative health care.**  
The success of alternative care depends on education; you must be informed about the modalities available and seek out a knowledgeable practitioner.
- 2. Choose practitioners with expertise in a wide variety of disciplines.**  
Ideally, you want someone who can integrate a natural approach with modern medicine, balancing the different approaches.
- 3. Find practitioners who focus on YOUR needs and circumstances.**  
Practitioners who will spend at least 20-30 minutes listening to you and establishing rapport are focused on finding the cause of your disorder. Make sure you can get your questions answered and feel good about your selection.
- 4. Choose an alternative approach you believe in.**  
Because the mental and emotional aspects of healing cannot be separated from the physical ones, it is vital to believe in the alternative method you choose.
- 5. Determine if the practitioner has relevant experience and training.** If available, have they received appropriate accreditation or licensing? Do they belong to applicable professional groups? If appropriate, did they graduate from an accredited program for the modality they practice? How many hours of training did they have? Did they apprentice with someone known as an "expert" in the particular modality? Have they been doing this for a number of years, and how successful have they been at treating similar conditions?
- 6. Get a sense of the practitioner's ability to treat YOUR particular condition.**  
Find out whether or not the practitioner has treated others with the same symptoms; have they used different modalities in different combinations for particular illnesses. Contact people about their experiences with this modality and practitioner.
- 7. Verify that the practitioner's approach reflects appropriate ethics.**  
Safe, professional practitioners don't diagnose or promise a cure; they don't give advice they are not trained to give. They work in conjunction with other health care professionals to integrate alternative and traditional treatment plans and to be their patient's advocates for the safe, alternative medicine choices.