

Message from the Parish Nurses

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THE FACTS ABOUT HEALTH NEWS STORIES

News stories about complementary approaches to health are often found on television, the internet, in newspapers, and magazines. In fact, the media is one of our main sources of information when we're trying to make decisions about complementary health approaches. While many news reports are reliable, some are missing important information, and some are confusing, conflicting, or misleading. Find out how to tell if a news story is reliable.

MISSING INFORMATION FROM HEALTH STORIES

Health stories in the media can teach us about the importance of health issues and can change how we think and what we can do to improve our health. High-quality news reports give us realistic expectations. But news stories about complementary health approaches often lack details that could help us make good decisions about our health. Information that is sometimes missing from news stories are:

- How well one approach works compared with another.
- The side effects of an approach.
- Whether a study's results are "statistically significant".
- Whether the study was done in animals or in people.

IS IT REAL ONLINE NEWS? OR JUST ADVERTISING?

On a fake "news" site, a story described an investigation in which a reporter used a product for several weeks, with "dramatic" results. The site looked real, but it was actually an advertisement. Everything was fake: there was no reporter, no news organization, and no investigation. The only real things were the links to a sales site. That appeared in the story. The following may be an indication that a "news" site is fake:

- The site endorses a product.
- The site quotes only people who say good things about the product.
- The site discusses only positive research results.
- The site contains links to a sales site.
- The site includes positive reader comments only, and you can't add a comment of your own.

CHECKLIST FOR UNDERSTANDING HEALTH NEWS

To figure out if a news report about a complementary health approach is giving you the full story, always ask yourself these questions.

- Was the product, procedure or device tested on people? Findings from animal or laboratory research may not be immediately meaningful to your health.
- Are there alternatives to the approach being discussed? You want to know what is already available, so you can compare your options.
- Where enough people studied? When the number of people in a study is small, the results aren't as strong.
- Were the results big enough to be meaningful to you? A small difference between two approaches might interest scientists but be of little importance to your health or quality of life.
- Did the researchers consider the many things that can influence results, such as participants' general health or health habits, or discuss the limitations of their results?
- Were the study participants similar to you in ways that may matter, such as age, race, or gender?
- Was the study lengthy enough to show long-term benefits or risks? Natural products may take time before they show benefits; some side effects may take months or years to show up.
- Have other researchers had similar results? One study rarely proves anything.
- Was the study funded by a group that would profit financially from the study findings? If so you should be wary of the results.

REMEMBER !!!

Reading, watching, or listening to health news about complementary health approaches can help you learn and stay informed about new medical finds. However, there's a lot of information to consider before you try a complementary approach featured in the news.

Remember, no matter how promising an approach may sound, it's important to talk about it with your health care providers before you try it.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse
Source: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. Last modified Oct.18, 2017

More information can be found at:

<http://nccih.nih.gov/health/know-science>

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for "6

Commonly Misunderstood Words About

Complementary Health Approaches". Click on

Parish Health Newsletter.

6 COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD WORDS ABOUT COMPLEMENTARY HEALTH APPROACHES

When it comes to some complementary and integrative health approaches, how some products or practices are labeled or talked about may be vague or confusing. For example, what is the difference between holistic medicine and homeopathic medicine? Often these terms are used interchangeably, but in fact they are very different.

Homeopathic

Homeopathic medicine is an alternative medicine system that was developed in Germany more than 200 years ago and is based in part on the principle called “law of minimum dose.” Which is the notion that the lower the dose of the medication, the greater its effectiveness. Many homeopathic remedies are so diluted that no molecules of the original substance remains; however, some products labeled as “homeopathic” can contain substantial amounts of active ingredients and therefore could cause side effects and drug interactions. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has warned consumers about different products labeled as homeopathic.

Holistic

The word holistic (sometimes spelled Wholistic) often refers to the treatment of the whole person - body, mind, emotions, and spirit – to achieve wellness and good health. People who practice holistic medicine may use conventional medications to treat a person’s ailment, but they will take into consideration other factors such as sleep habits, lifestyle, stress, and diet to improve health and relieve symptoms.

Natural

When it comes to medicine, there is no official definition for use of the term natural. And it’s important to know that a medicinal product labeled natural does not always mean safe. For example, the herbs comfrey and kava may be considered natural products, but they can cause serious harm to the liver. An herbal or botanical supplement labeled natural may contain dozens of chemical compounds and all of its individual components may not be known.

Naturopathic

Naturopathic medicine is a medical system that has evolved from a combination of traditional practices and

health care approaches popular in Europe during the 19th century. In the United States, naturopathic practitioners use many different treatment approaches, including dietary and lifestyle changes, stress reduction or relaxation techniques, herbs or botanicals, dietary supplements, and other natural products, homeopathy, manipulative therapies, counseling, conventional medicine, and others.

Complementary Health Approaches

Complementary health approaches includes a broad range of practices, interventions, and natural products, which are not typically part of conventional medical care, or which may have origins outside of usual Western practice. Complementary health approaches can be roughly divided into major groups – mind and body practice, and natural products.

Alternative Medicine

Like complementary health approaches, alternative medicine are products or practices developed outside of mainstream Western, or conventional, medicine, but they are used in place of conventional medicine.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

Source: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. Last modified Sep. 24, 2017
More information can be found at:
<http://ncccih.nih.gov/health/know-science>