4 Things To Know About Menopausal Symptoms and Complementary Health Practices

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Menopause is the permanent end of a woman's menstrual periods. Menopause can occur naturally or be caused by surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation. During the years around menopause, some women have hot flashes, night sweats, difficulty sleeping, or other bothersome symptoms. Natural products or mind and body practices are sometimes used in an effort to relieve menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats, also known as vasomotor symptoms (VMS).

Here are 4 things to know if you are considering a complementary health approach for managing menopausal symptoms:

1. Mind and body practices such as hypnosis, mindfulness meditation, and tai chi may help improve some menopausal symptoms. Researchers looked at mind and body therapies for menopausal symptoms and found that tai chi and meditation-based programs may be helpful in reducing common menopausal symptoms including the frequency and intensity of hot flashes, sleep and mood disturbances, stress, and muscle and joint pain. There is also some evidence that hypnotherapy may help women manage hot flashes.
2. Many natural products, such as black cohosh, soy isoflavone supplements, and DHEA, have been studied for their effects on menopausal symptoms, but scientists have found little evidence that they are helpful. There is also no conclusive evidence that the herbs red clover, kava, or dong quai reduce hot flashes.
3. Natural products used for menopausal symptoms can have side effects and can interact with other botanicals or supplements or with medications. For example, rare cases of liver damage—some of them very serious—have been reported in people taking commercial black cohosh products. Also, concerns have been raised about the safety of DHEA because it is converted in the body to hormones, which are known to carry risks.
4. Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.a

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