Complementary and Alternative Medical Therapies for Diabetes

Complementary and alternative medicines are health care practices or products that are not always accepted as part of routine medicine. Complementary medicine is used along with routine medicine (*medical therapy*). Alternative medicine can sometimes be used instead of routine medicine.

Some people use these methods to treat diabetes. While some of these therapies may be effective, others may not be. Some may even be harmful. Patients using these methods need to tell their caregiver. It is important to let your caregivers know what you are doing. Some of these therapies are discussed below. **For more information, talk with your caregiver.**

THERAPIES:

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture is done by a professional who inserts needles into certain points on the skin. Some scientists believe that this triggers the release of the body's natural painkillers. It has been shown to relieve long-term (*chronic*) pain. This may help patients with painful nerve damage caused by diabetes.

BIOFEEDBACK

Biofeedback helps a person become more aware of the body's response to pain. It also helps you learn to deal with the pain. This alternative therapy focuses on relaxation and stress-reduction techniques. Thinking of peaceful mental images (*guided imagery*) is one technique. Some people believe these images can ease their condition.

MEDICATIONS:

CHROMIUM

Several studies report that chromium supplements may improve diabetes control. Chromium helps insulin improve its action. Research is not yet certain. Supplements have not been recommended or approved. Caution is needed if you have kidney (*renal*) problems.

GINSENG

There are several types of ginseng plants. American ginseng is used for diabetes studies. Those studies have shown some glucose-lowering effects. Those effects have been seen with fasting and after-meal blood glucose levels. They have also been seen in A1c levels (*average blood glucose levels over a 3-month period*). More long-term studies are needed before recommendations for use of ginseng can be made.

MAGNESIUM

Experts have studied the relationship between magnesium and diabetes for many years. But it is not yet fully understood. Studies suggest that a low amount of magnesium may make blood glucose control worse in type 2 diabetes. Research also shows that a low amount may contribute to certain diabetes complications. One study showed that people who consume more magnesium had less risk of type 2 diabetes. Eating whole grains, nuts, and green leafy vegetables raises the magnesium level.

VANADIUM

Vanadium is a compound found in tiny amounts in plants and animals. Early studies showed that vanadium improved blood glucose levels in animals with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. One study found that when given vanadium, those with diabetes were able to decrease their insulin dosage. Researchers still need to learn how it works in the body to discover any side effects, and to find safe dosages.

CINNAMON

There have been a couple of studies that seem to indicate cinnamon decreases insulin resistance and increases insulin production. By doing so, it may lower blood glucose. Exact doses are unknown, but it may work best when used in combination with other diabetes medicines.

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