



Complementary and Alternative Therapies

What to Expect

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia is committed to your protection and safety.

This is a summary of what you can expect of your physician if they provide you with a complementary or alternative therapy.



What is a complementary or alternative therapy?

Unlike conventional (“mainstream”) medicine, complementary and alternative therapies are often not supported by the widely accepted views of the medical profession. A complementary or alternative therapy can be a new or emerging treatment which carries potential safety risks and uncertain health benefits that are not fully understood. Some examples include homeopathy and natural health products, such as dietary supplements.

A complementary therapy is used alongside a conventional medical treatment, while an alternative therapy is used in place of a conventional medical treatment.

What can you expect from a physician who provides a complementary or alternative therapy?

Should your physician provide you with a complementary or alternative therapy, they must:

- first complete a medical history and physical exam to establish a diagnosis and appropriate treatment plan
- not delay or replace the use of a conventional therapy with a complementary or alternative therapy (unless you direct them to do so)
- be confident that the therapy is safe, or at the very least, does not pose a greater risk to your safety than conventional therapies (or the option of no treatment)
- educate you about the risks, benefits and alternatives of all treatment choices
- receive your consent to the therapy and document this in your medical record
- respect your independence in choosing from all available treatment options
- conduct ongoing assessments to ensure the effectiveness and safety of the therapy
- never take advantage of your emotions, vulnerability, or finances for personal gain

Do physicians need extra training before they can provide a complementary or alternative therapy?

The College holds physicians individually accountable for their own training and does not assess training or education related to complementary or alternative therapies.

Can you be charged for a complementary or alternative therapy?

In most circumstances, complementary and alternative therapies are not covered by BC’s public insurance (Medical Services Plan), and physicians may charge you a fee. If you are asked to pay for an uninsured therapy, the fee must be reasonably aligned with the service provided and discussed with you in advance.

To learn more, read the College’s practice standard [Complementary and Alternative Therapies](#).