



Pharmacy Services

Alternative Medicine Policy

What is an alternative medicine?

Alternative medicines include the following:

- High-dose vitamins and minerals
- Herbal products and dietary supplements
- Amino acids
- Homeopathic products

Why do people use alternative medicines?

- Alternative medicines often cost less than prescription medications
- Alternative medicines may be effective for some problems
- People can treat themselves without seeing a doctor
- An assumption is made that because these products are “natural” it is safer to use them than to take prescription medications

What is Greenville Health System’s policy on alternative medicine use?

Greenville Health System (GHS) is aware of patients’ interest in alternative therapies as part of their healthcare routine. In fact, more than 50 percent of U.S. adults use alternative medicine products, spending over \$6 billion annually on them. However, using these products during your hospital stay may interfere with your care.

Therefore, as a patient receiving treatment at GHS, you are urged not to use alternative medicines for the following reasons:

- Limited information exists about how these products work, the best dose to take, potential side effects and interactions with other medicines
- These products may interfere with laboratory (blood) tests, other testing procedures, surgeries and the hospital diet
- Little information is available on the safety and usefulness of many of these products
- Because of the many brands of alternative medicine, it is difficult for hospital staff to correctly identify these products
- The content of herbal medicines can vary greatly from brand to brand
- Alternative medicine products are not monitored for purity

However, if you still choose to use alternative medicines, keep these points in mind:

- Always tell your doctor, pharmacist, nurse and other healthcare professionals that you are using alternative medicines, especially if you take prescription drugs, plan to have surgery or have chronic medical conditions
- Be aware that while side effects may not be seen with occasional alternative medicine use, it does not mean such products have been proven safe for long-term use
- Select well-known and recognized products and manufacturers
- Read the label for an accurate listing of herbal content and other ingredients
- Stop taking alternative medicines two weeks before any planned surgery
- Recognize that “natural” does not automatically mean “safe”
- Read labels to avoid doubling of vitamins, minerals or herbal products
- Buy only products that have a lot number and expiration date as well as the address and phone number of the manufacturer on the label

What are some reliable information sources on alternative medicines? (Note: this list is not all-inclusive.)

At GHS, Pharmacy Services is the best source of reliable information. To reach the department, please call (864) 455-8815.

Internet

herbalgram.org
nal.usda.gov/gnic/IBIDS

Books

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database, 2013; Therapeutic Research Faculty.

Tyler, Varro: *The Honest Herbal*, 1993; Pharmaceutical Press.

Tyler, Varro: *Herbs of Choice*, 1999; Hayworth Press.