

There are different types of allergic conditions. This leaflet is about using complementary and alternative medicine to diagnose or treat allergies.

### What is complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)?

CAM includes practices and ideas that are usually not accepted by conventional medicine. Common CAM methods that are suggested to diagnose allergies include Vega testing, IgG testing, hair analysis and kinesiology, and common treatment types are homeopathy, acupuncture and herbal medicine.

### What is the problem using CAM for allergies?

A health professional will get some idea of what may be causing a person's allergic symptoms from talking to them. But they also need reliable allergy tests as part of their diagnosis and proven treatment methods.

**There is no evidence that the tests and treatment used in complementary and alternative medicine work.** Stories or testimonials told by one or two people do not provide proper evidence of the test or treatment working; their experience could just be due to chance.

**Unorthodox tests and treatments are not regulated.** To protect patients, any claims made by registered medical practitioners are regulated by the government. This is not the case for CAM practitioners, who are able to make claims that they can detect or cure conditions without any evidence.

**If you are using CAM in any way, you should always inform your health professional.**

### Unproven tests for diagnosing allergies

Test	How and why is this test performed?	Results
Vega Testing (electrodermal testing)	The CAM practitioner measures small changes in skin electrical resistance in response to test substances placed in a circuit. They interpret any change in current as showing the person is "sensitive" to that particular substance.	<b>There is no value in doing this test</b> as the results it gives in no way resemble those obtained using proven allergy testing.
IgG testing (sold as Food Detective™ Home Test)	The makers claim that if you place a finger-prick blood sample on the special tray provided, the Food Detective "identifies foods causing IgG antibody production" that "may be involved in various conditions such as food intolerance, irritable bowel syndrome, eczema and arthritis".	<b>There is no credible evidence</b> that measuring IgG antibodies is useful for diagnosing food allergy or intolerance. Incorrect dietary advice and avoidance can result from this test.



Hair analysis	The test is a mineral analysis of a hair sample. These tests are conducted in private laboratories using test that have no regulation.	<b>There is no good evidence</b> that low concentration of an element in your hair reflects what is in your body.
Kinesiology	Kinesiology is based on the idea that if someone is exposed to toxins or allergens their muscle strength will be reduced. The tester measures the person's muscle strength before and after exposing them to a particular food.	Controlled studies have shown that kinesiology results are not reproducible and are no more accurate than guess-work.
Cytotoxic food testing or Leukocytotoxic test	The tester places a drop of diluted blood from the patient on a slide coated with a food extract. According to the test, if any distorted white blood cells can be seen under a microscope, the patient is allergic to that food.	<b>The test is not effective</b> for food and inhalant allergens, as shown by a number of controlled trials. There is no evidence for other allergies.

### Unproven therapies for treating allergies

Test	Why is this therapy used?	Results
Homeopathy	Homeopathy is based on two beliefs, that 'like cures like' and that the more you dilute a substance, the more you increase its power to treat symptoms that it would otherwise cause.	From more than 110 trials there is <b>no good evidence</b> that homeopathy works better than a placebo (or sugar pill).
Advanced allergy elimination or Nambudripad's allergy elimination	This therapy uses a combination of CAM procedures, including acupuncture, chiropractic and applied kinesiology. It is based on the belief that allergy can be removed from the body.	<b>There is no good evidence</b> that allergy can be removed from the body using this technique. <i>At the present time, the only proven technique that is close to being a "cure" for allergy is allergen immunotherapy for proven allergies to inhalants or stinging insects. This type of therapy is conducted under carefully controlled medical conditions, usually in a hospital.</i>
Acupuncture	Acupuncture is a form of ancient Chinese medicine in which fine needles are inserted into the skin at certain points on the body. There is some evidence that acupuncture may work for a small number of conditions, including migraine and post-operative nausea.	<b>There is no good evidence</b> showing that acupuncture works for any allergic condition.



Herbal medicine	Herbal medicine uses plants or plant extracts to treat illness.	<b>There is no good robust proof</b> that herbal medicine is effective for eczema. There is evidence that some Chinese herbal medicines may have caused liver damage in some patients.
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### What is the problem with using unproven tests and therapies?

Tests and treatments not known to be reliable and safe can – directly or indirectly – lead to things getting worse for a patient.

- Unnecessary diet restrictions can cause malnutrition.
- There may be a delay in accessing effective tests and treatments.
- A person with a potentially dangerous allergy who has been treated with so-called “allergy elimination techniques” may expose themselves to risk because they believe they are protected.
- Test, treatments and diets can be very expensive and may be unnecessary.

### Questions to ask unorthodox practitioners

The law does not effectively prevent unorthodox practitioners from offering tests or treatments for allergies even when there is no evidence that they work. The RCPCH is concerned about the harm that can be done when people are considering these tests or treatments. It suggests that you ask these questions:

- What is the evidence it works?
- Has such evidence been published in medical journals? If so, which ones and how do I access them?
- What are the risks and benefits?
- What might happen if I do not undertake this form of treatment?
- How much does it cost?
- Are there any side effects?
- Why doesn't my own doctor suggest this type of treatment?
- What are the qualifications of the practitioner recommending the treatment?
- Why can this one test or treatment detect or treat so many different problems?

<sup>1</sup>This leaflet has been adapted from an article on the website of the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology & Allergy (ASCI) <http://www.allergy.org.au/content/view/261/123/>

### Where can you get further information?

Homeopathy: [www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/pdf/SenseAboutHomeopathy.pdf](http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/pdf/SenseAboutHomeopathy.pdf)

