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Alternative medicine is not beneficial for children... and they can be harmful

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[Volumen 5. N°3. Septiembre 2012](#) [1]

Palabras clave: side effects, alternative medicine, traditional medicine, homeopathy

What is alternative medicine?

The term “alternative medicine” refers to some procedures («therapies») that are used in order to cure people and that do not belong to conventional medicine ones.

Which are these procedures or therapies?

These procedures are some, various and they have little or nothing in common among them. Hence, within “alternative medicine”, homeopathy, craniosacral therapy, some herbal remedies, acupuncture, hypnosis, aromatherapy and osteopathy are included among others.

Is alternative medicine effective?

There have been many studies in order to determine if these therapies are effective to relieve different illnesses and all kind of diseases, both for children and adults. All the studies that have been conducted have shown that these therapies are not effective to cure or relieve the illnesses for which they are used.

I know some people who have been successful with these therapies...

Indeed there can be people who find some beneficial effects to relieve a minor ailment. This is the so called “placebo effect”. This effect is the psychological effect that some medicine, which lack active substances to relieve an illness, provokes in patients. This effect is equivalent to no real healing effect.

I am not really convinced... Are there studies in which alternative and traditional medicine have been compared?

Of course there are and they are published in biomedical journals. Taking on of the most used alternative therapies as an example, homeopathy, it is known that patients who are treated with this therapy improve their state. This is compatible with placebo effect (this is to say, no real healing effect over the treated illness) whereas those treated with conventional medicine show signs of improvement which are objective, real and measurable, attributable to the conventional treatment administered.

Am I harming my child if I treat a health problem with alternative medicine?

As it has been pointed out, alternative medicine has no real effect over the patient. If the illness or disease that is

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treated with these therapies is unimportant (for instance, a baby colic or common colds...) we can say they won't harm them ... although they will not be beneficial either. They are illnesses that get solved as time goes by.

However, alternative therapies can be very harmful and cause serious damage, even death, depending on which illness is treated, when they are used to treat serious diseases (for instance, cancer) replacing conventional medicine treatments.

Apart from the aforementioned, it is to be borne in mind that there are some doubts about these alternative product safety since, although they can be purchased in pharmacies, they are not subject to the security controls that are compulsory for conventional medicines.

If you want to know more:

Ugarte Libano R. *La homeopatía y la AEPap*. [Rev Pediatr Aten Primaria. 2010;12:165-7](#) [2].

Complementary or alternative medicine and its use in children. [Evid Pediatr](#) [3]

Alternative medicine. En http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicina_alternativa [4]

Placebo effect. En http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Efecto_placebo [5]

Homeopathic medicine has a similar efficiency to placebo effect in comparison to conventional medicine. [Evid Pediatr](#) [6]

There is no evidence that show that complementary or alternative therapies help in different paediatric illnesses . [Evid Pediatr](#) [7]