



# Know the Science: Checklist for Understanding Health News Stories

To figure out if a news report about a complementary health approach is giving you the full story, you can ask yourself these questions.

- 1** Was the product, procedure, or device tested on people? Findings from animal or laboratory research may not be immediately meaningful to your health until rigorous clinical research is conducted examining the result further.
- 2** Are there alternatives to the approach being discussed? Knowing what else is available can help you compare the options.
- 3** Were enough people studied? When the number of people in a study is small, the results aren't as strong.
- 4** Were the results big enough to be meaningful to you? A small difference between two approaches might interest scientists but be of little importance to your health or quality of life.
- 5** Did the story talk about the limitations of the study or its findings?
- 6** Were the study participants similar to you in ways that may matter, such as age, race, or gender?
- 7** Was the study lengthy enough to show long-term benefits or risks? Natural products may take time before they show benefits; some side effects may take months or years to show up.
- 8** Is this the first time a study has been reported with these results? One study rarely proves anything.
- 9** Was the study funded by a group that could profit financially from the study findings? If so, you should be wary of the results.

## Remember...

Reading, watching, or listening to news about complementary health approaches can help you learn and stay informed about new medical findings. However, there's a lot of important information to consider before you try a complementary approach featured in the news. No matter how promising an approach may sound, it's important to talk about it with your health care providers before you try it.