

Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Treatment of Food Allergy



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KEYWORDS

- Complementary and alternative medicine • Integrative medicine • Treatment
- Food allergy

KEY POINTS

- The prevalence of food allergy has increased over the past 15 to 20 years. It can be life threatening and there is no US Food and Drug Administration–approved treatment available.
- Allergen avoidance and rescue medication following accidental exposure remain the sole management tools.
- Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use is common in the United States. However, research into safety and efficacy for food allergy is limited. Continued scientific research into food allergy herbal formula 2 (FAHF-2), refined methods of formulation, purified compounds, and other modalities are needed to improve knowledge about how they work.
- Traditional Chinese medicine is the main component of CAM in the United States. In addition, acupuncture has been reported to reduce wheal size, skin itching following allergen skin tests, and basophil activation in individuals with atopic dermatitis.
- It is important that conventional doctors, CAM practitioners, and patients' families collaborate to manage food allergies, improve the medicines, and improve patients' quality of life.

Conflicts of Interest: X.M. Li received research support from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)/the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE), and Winston Wolkoff Integrative Medicine Fund for Allergies and Wellness; received consultancy fees from FARE and Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, LLC; received royalties from UpToDate; received travel expenses from the NCCAM and FARE and Universities; received practice compensation from the Ming Qi Natural Health Care Center/Integrative Health and Acupuncture; and is 42.5% shareholder of Herbs Springs, LLC, which holds the patents on FAHF-2 and B-FAHF-2.

Disclosures: The author received funding support from NIH/NCCAM grants, P01 AT002647-01A1, R01s AT001495-05A1/AT001495-05A2, The Food Allergy Research and Education, The Parker Foundation, The Winston Wolkoff Fund, Mr. Pichugov/Mrs. Sherbakova fund, The Drako family fund, and David Schlesinger fund.

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Immunol Allergy Clin N Am 38 (2018) 103–124

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iac.2017.09.012>

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INTRODUCTION

Food allergy affects 6% to 8% of American children, and 2% of adults. Prevalence has increased over the past 15 to 20 years. It can be life threatening and there is no US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved treatment available. Allergen avoidance and rescue medication following accidental exposure remain the sole management tools. Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use is common in the United States. However, research into safety and efficacy for food allergy is limited. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is the main component of CAM in the United States. The herbal formulas FAHF-1 (food allergy herbal formula-1), FAHF-2 (food allergy herbal formula-2), B-FAHF-2 (butanol purified food allergy herbal formula-2), E-B-FAHF-2 (enhanced B-FAHF-2) (derived from the classic TCM formula Wu Mei Wan) prevent systemic anaphylaxis in murine food allergy models; FAHF-2, and its refined forms B-FAHF-2 and E-B-FAHF-2, are the only TCM food allergy products that have been FDA approved as botanic investigational new drugs (INDs). Phase I clinical studies showed that FAHF-2 is safe, had an immunomodulatory effect on T cells, and suppressed basophil activation. The traditional Japanese herbal medicine kakkonto suppressed allergic diarrhea and decreased the number of mast cells in intestinal mucosa in a murine model. In addition, acupuncture has been reported to reduce wheal size, skin itching following allergen skin tests, and basophil activation in individuals with atopic dermatitis. Studies also showed that probiotics and nutrition are beneficial for prevention or therapy. This article reviews recent advances in CAM for food allergy, focusing on herbal medicine and other CAM modalities, including acupuncture and probiotics.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE/INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE USE IN THE TREATMENT OF ALLERGY

Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the United States

CAM is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products not considered part of conventional medicine but that are sometimes used with conventional medicine and sometimes in place of it. Integrative medicine combines conventional and CAM treatments for which there is evidence of safety and effectiveness.¹ CAM is popular for wellness and some chronic conditions. In December 2008, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) and the National Center for Health Statistics (part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) released new findings on Americans' use of CAM.² The survey of 23,393 adults aged 18 years or older and 9417 children aged 17 years and younger found that 38% of adults and 12% of children had used CAM in some form during the 12 months before the survey. They included people of all backgrounds. CAM use among adults is greater among women and those with higher levels of education and income. This finding is consistent with the previous survey.³ CAM includes natural products such as herbal medicines, vitamins, and probiotics, and mind-body therapy such as acupuncture, acupressure, cupping, and qigong. Among CAM users, 75% also used at least 1 prescription drug. In a 2010 publication, 6 in 10 Americans reported using dietary supplements, and 1 in 6 Americans reported using herbal remedies on a regular basis.⁴

Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Allergy Practices

CAM practices in the treatment of allergy/immunology are increasing too. In 2009, the Complementary and Alternative Practices Committee of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) reported findings of a national survey of allergy specialists. This survey focused on the attitudes of academy members toward CAM. It found that 80% of respondents were interested in learning more about

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