

Circle Of LifeSM: Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities



American Cancer Society Circle Of LifeSM
Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

**Wellness along the Cancer Journey:
American Indian, Alaska Native, and
Complementary Healing**



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WELLNESS ALONG THE CANCER JOURNEY: AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKA NATIVE, AND COMPLEMENTARY HEALING

Goals: This supplemental module describes the importance of American Indian, Alaska Native, and complementary healing practices. It covers the following:

- What is the history of American Indian and Alaska Native healing practices?
- What are the differences between complementary and alternative healing practices?
- What are some questions to ask about complementary or alternative methods?



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American Indian, Alaska Native, and Complementary Healing

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Chapter 1: Module Overview



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Module Overview

American Indian and Alaska Native healing includes the wide spectrum of healing beliefs and practices found among hundreds of tribes of North America. It combines religion and spirit with herbs and rituals. This approach is used to treat people with medical, emotional, and spiritual problems.

From the Native point of view, medicine is more about healing the person than curing a disease. Healers aim to “make whole” by bringing harmony to a person’s life. This includes harmony with the community and the spirit of nature, which is sometimes called God or the Creator. Healing is based on the belief that every person and thing on earth is connected. Each person, animal, and plant has a spirit or essence. Even an object, such as a river or rock, and even the earth itself, may be thought to have this kind of spirit.

American Indians and Alaska Natives have a tradition that believes illness and disease stem from a person not being balanced (spiritually, mentally, and physically). Such a person may have unhealthy habits or unhealthy thoughts. American Indian and Alaska Native healing practices aim to find and restore balance and wholeness in a person. They seek to bring a person back to a healthy and spiritually pure state.

There are many types of American Indian and Alaska Native healing practices that are promoted to help with a number of illnesses. American Indian and Alaska Native healing include the use of herbal remedies, as well as rituals, ceremonies, and symbolic therapies. Medicine men and women may use these ways to treat illnesses of both the body and spirit.

Purifying rituals are often used to cleanse the body and prepare the person for healing. An American Indian or Alaska Native healer may focus on using spiritual powers to treat people. Symbolic healing rituals, which can involve family and friends of the sick person, are used to invoke the spirits to help heal the sick person.