



A GUIDE TO ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Complimentary and Alternative medicine (CAM) represents one of the fastest growing segments of the health care industry, as well as the most controversial. It has been estimated that Americans are spending \$15 billion including 600 million visits annually on unconventional medicine and these figures are rapidly increasing.

A wide range of alternative methods, treatments and products are currently being used to heal chronic and acute ailments, as well as prevent disease and improve quality of life.

Some of the most commonly used alternative methods are described here. Some of these methods have not been investigated and/or approved by any government or regulatory agency. National, state, and local laws vary regarding the use and application of these treatments. This information should not be substituted for the advice and treatment of a physician or other licensed health professional. Rather, they should be used in conjunction with professional care. If you are thinking of trying an alternative form of medical treatment, be sure to discuss the options with your physician.



Acupuncture

This is one of the oldest systems of healing still practiced today. Its recorded history goes back 5,000 years and is part of Chinese medicine. The practice is based on the belief that the body's life force, Qi, (also referred to as chi) circulates along 12 meridian pathways, each linked to specific organs and organ systems. The Chinese believe that disease occurs when the balanced flow of Qi is disrupted. By inserting special sterile needles at specific points on the meridian (just under the skin), the energy flow or Qi, is redirected. There are over 1,000 acupoints within the meridian system that can be stimulated to enhance the flow of Qi. When energy is flowing the body's own healing mechanisms take over.

Since there is much variation within acupuncture technique and among practitioners, look for a professional who is certified by the National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncturists (NCCA). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) now officially recognizes acupuncture as a legitimate form of medical treatment for acute and chronic illnesses. Conditions benefited by acupuncture according to the World Health Organization include: pain, migraines, sinusitis, asthma, addictions, osteoarthritis, and more.



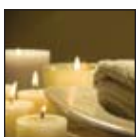
Ayurveda

This system of natural healing, ayurveda, (meaning "science of life") was practiced in India for the past 5,000 years. Its basic principle is that each individual has a mind-body energy type known as dosha, which is influenced by everything we do and experience. Health is maintained by balancing dosha with lifestyle and environment by using therapies such as, meditation, dietary changes, massage, exercise, herbal tonics and medicated inhalations.



Bodywork

Bodywork is a catchall term for therapies such as massage, deep tissue manipulation (like rolfing), movement awareness, (such as the Feldenkrais Method and the Alexander technique), and energy balance (such as acupressure and polarity therapy). Today, the majority of bodywork practitioners use a combination of bodywork methods. The principle behind each of these techniques is that the use of pressure and touch can alter tension, stress, and structural imbalances in the body.



Aromatherapy

This unique branch of herbal medicine utilizes the properties found in the essential oils extracted from plants and herbs to treat conditions ranging from infections and skin disorders to immune deficiencies and stress. The benefits of essential oils can be obtained through inhalation, external application, or ingestion.

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Chiropractic

Manipulative therapy, commonly called a chiropractic adjustment, is the art of restoring full and pain-free range of motion to the spine and joints.

Chiropractic is concerned with the relationship of the spinal column and the musculoskeletal structures of the body to the nervous system. Alignment of the spine is essential for optimal health since it is thought to be the “switchboard” for the nervous system. Pain and illness occurs when there is nerve interference caused by misalignments in the spine. There are many types of chiropractic treatment used today. Most techniques involve a touch or manipulation in which the joint is stretched slightly beyond its normal range of motion. Many insurance companies are now paying for chiropractic services because it has been shown in many cases to be as effective as traditional orthopedic medicine.



Herbal Medicine

Herbs contain a large number of naturally occurring chemicals that can perform many healing functions in the body, but only if they are used appropriately.

Herbalists will contend that herbal remedies are less likely than most conventional medicines to cause side effects, however, most will agree that herbs can be very potent. Herbs contain active ingredients and everyone should be aware that some of these elements might interact negatively with prescribed medications. It is wise to consult a health professional when there is a question about safety.

Herbs come in many forms such as dried, powdered, teas, capsules, tablets, extracts, tinctures, essential oils, salves, balm, and ointments. A growing number of American consumers have benefited by herbal medicine in treating: stomach upset, the common cold, minor aches and pains, constipation, diarrhea, coughs, rashes, sunburn and insomnia. Other less minor conditions include: peptic ulcers, colitis, arthritic conditions, skin problems, PMS, bronchitis, allergies, and hypertension.



Homeopathy

This system of medicine is based on the principle of similars, in which a substance can cure the same problems that it can cause. Homeopaths, assess the uniqueness and sensations of a symptom and select one particular homeopathic medicine or remedy that matches the symptom. The natural substances used in homeopathic remedies come from various plant, mineral, and animal sources. Many can be self-administered and are available in lower potency over-the-counter form.

The classic homeopath is always aware of the whole person and treats the mental, emotional, and physical dimensions. Traditionally, one remedy and only one remedy at a time is typically

prescribed. However, more and more homeopathic practitioners today use “combination” formulas that contain several remedies to cover a broad range of symptoms for an acute condition. This may be similar to what you see in a conventional cold medicine. Homeopathic professionals claim that remedies are safe, non-toxic, and effective for individuals of all ages.



Meditation

There are lots of meditation techniques which work; many start with a simple focus on deep, slow breathing. Relaxation exercises may involve tensing then relaxing muscle groups. In some meditation styles you are given a word to repeat to yourself; in others you allow your thoughts to float through your mind.

Meditation simply works by bringing about a state of relaxation by causing a general decrease in heart rate, respiration rate, and a decrease in the hormones associated with the stress response. Research has shown that conditions benefited by meditation include the areas of stress control and pain management.



Reflexology

A reflexologist believes that specific areas on the feet reflect all the body's internal systems and organs.

According to reflexologists, by applying systematic pressure to those points, also known as reflex zones, there is an increased circulation of blood and nerve supply in the body which triggers the natural healing process.



Traditional Chinese Medicine

This ancient method of health care combines the use of medicinal herbs, acupuncture, food therapy, massage and therapeutic exercise to restore and

enhance health. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) looks for the underlying causes of imbalances and patterns of disharmony in the body. In addition, each patient is viewed as being unique.

The term's yin and yang are used by the TCM practitioner to describe the various opposing physical conditions of the body. Qi, (referred to as chi) is seen as the vital life energy that flows through the body. A flowing balance of these three forces is necessary in maintaining and restoring health. TCM treats both acute and chronic illness and research has shown that it can effectively complement modern Western medicine.

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