

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE: NON-DRUG TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT

Pain management continues to challenge healthcare providers and places added strain on an already fragmented health care system. The U.S. health system was built around acute illness; however, because of advances in modern medicine and increased longevity, many Americans are living longer and with one or more chronic conditions (for example, cancer, diabetes, heart disease and arthritis), which require careful coordination of care and symptom management.

While pain is a symptom of many chronic diseases and is expected after many surgical procedures, persistent pain should not be viewed simply as a symptom. According to experts, the pain itself becomes a disease

when the origin of the pain signals fails to shut off due to damage of the pain alarm system, leaving the person with persisting pain.

Whatever the cause, chronic pain transcends the physical hurting. Persistent pain interferes with daily life and relationships, and takes a tremendous toll on a person's mind, body and spirit. It's no surprise that pain and associated problems (e.g., medication side effects, depression and anxiety, limited mobility) are best managed using a combination of treatments tailored to each patient. This is referred to as a "multi-modal" or integrative approach.



Integrative medicine combines conventional medicine with complementary healing techniques, such as massage, yoga and acupuncture, to address the specific needs. Because an interdisciplinary approach to pain management is patient-centered, patients learn how to manage and cope with pain by playing an active role in their treatment plan.

Integrative medicine combines treatments from conventional medicine and complementary and alternative therapies for which there is some high-quality evidence of safety and effectiveness.¹ Being able to deliver integrated medicine, which incorporates proven CAM therapies into "mainstream" care, is increasingly important to consumers and healthcare providers.⁴

Benefits of Combined Treatment Modalities

While medications remain an integral part of pain management plans, non-drug therapies may be used to supplement and enhance the effectiveness of current pain medications. These strategies also offer additional options for those patients at greater risk for, or who are intolerant of, medication side effects.

Moreover, a growing body of research reinforces the benefits of interventions that address the psychosocial aspects of pain, especially given recent evidence of a biological link between the regions of the brain involved with depression and pain regulation. People with pain often suffer from depression, which can affect a patient's thinking, concentration and behavior, and increase pain sensitivity and severity.

Effective pain management may also require lifestyle changes that are supportive of patient mobility and independence.² For example, to improve daily functioning, specific therapies may be suggested to increase muscle strength and flexibility, enhance sleep and reduce fatigue, and assist patients in performing usual activities and work-related tasks.

As with the management of other chronic illnesses, patients with chronic pain need to play an active role in their care and incorporate non-drug options and other lifestyle changes (e.g., exercise, proper nutrition) over the long-term.

Patients Seek Complementary Treatments

In their quest for better pain relief, patients are increasingly turning to non-drug approaches to help ease their discomfort and give them a sense of empowerment and control. There are a wide variety of non-drug therapies available to treat pain and related disability including:

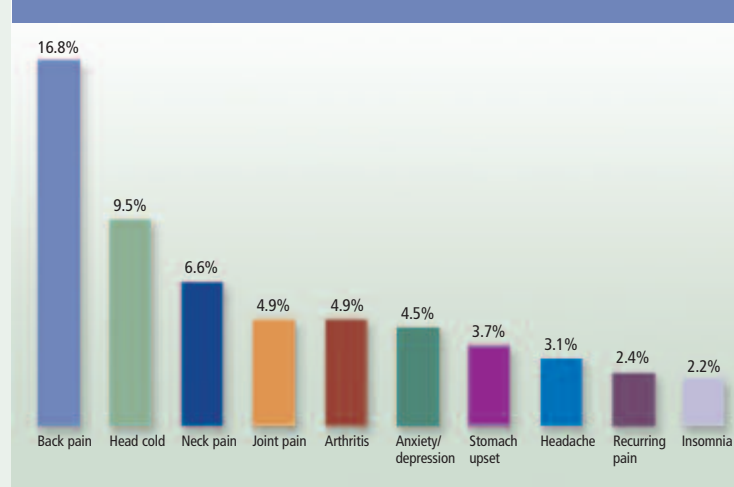
- *Psychosocial interventions* – cognitive behavioral therapy, stress management
- *Rehabilitation techniques* – exercise, heat or cold therapy, physical therapy
- *Complementary and alternative medicine* – meditation, acupuncture, hypnotherapy, yoga, aromatherapy, massage, touch therapy

Not surprisingly, pain conditions are among those most likely to prompt patients to turn to complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies. These practices also give patients a greater sense of control, so they no longer feel that they are solely dependent on a single pill or procedure.

COMMON NON-DRUG OPTIONS FOR PAIN RELIEF

- Stress management techniques (e.g., meditation, deep breathing and relaxation exercises)
- Massage
- Application of heat or cold, including heating pads or ice packs
- Acupuncture
- Visualization
- Physical therapy, including stretching or exercise
- Hypnotherapy
- Psychological and spiritual counseling
- Biofeedback
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, also known as TENS

Diseases/Conditions for Which CAM is Used Most Often



Source: NCCAM, *The Uses of CAM in the United States*.

What is CAM?

CAM includes a diverse group of healing systems, practices and products that are not part of conventional medicine. Examples of CAM therapies include acupuncture, massage, meditation, hypnosis, yoga and herbal therapies. These approaches are increasingly used to help manage pain and related issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, fatigue) and enhance patients' quality of life. NCCAM, one of 27 institutes and centers designated by the National Institutes of Health, is the lead agency for scientific research on CAM and groups these therapies into four areas.

CAM DOMAINS DEFINED

Mind-body medicine	Uses a variety of techniques designed to enhance the mind's ability to affect the body's function and symptoms. Examples include meditation, hypnosis, guided imagery, prayer, as well as art or music therapy.
Biologically based practices	Use substances found in nature, such as herbs, special diets or vitamins. Some examples include dietary supplements or herbal products (e.g., garlic, ginger, Kava Kava).
Manipulative and body-based practices	Based on manipulation or movement of one or more parts of the body. Examples include massage and chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation.
Energy medicine	Involves the use of energy fields, such as magnetic fields or biofields (energy that some believe surround and run through the body). Examples include qi gong, Reiki and therapeutic touch.

Many CAM practices are gentle methods that tend to have fewer side effects, which is part of their appeal to patients. Patients also use these therapies to help alleviate the associated stress, depression and insomnia that can accompany and worsen pain sensations.

Some CAM practices, such as acupuncture, massage and chiropractic care require the practitioner to be licensed. It's important for patients to research and find a CAM practitioner who is certified, willing and equipped to coordinate with other members of the patient's health team, and has experience working with patients with chronic pain.

When tailored to the individual patient, non-drug approaches to pain management can help:

- Allow patients to take an active role in managing their pain, thereby, improving patient satisfaction
- Address the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of patients
- Reduce pain and manage related symptoms (e.g., pain and anxiety, depression, insomnia, fatigue)
- Enhance the effectiveness and minimize adverse effects of medications
- Reduce health care costs by reducing doctor visits and reliance on medications
- Improve functioning and the ability to perform activities of daily living
- Enhance wellness and quality of life

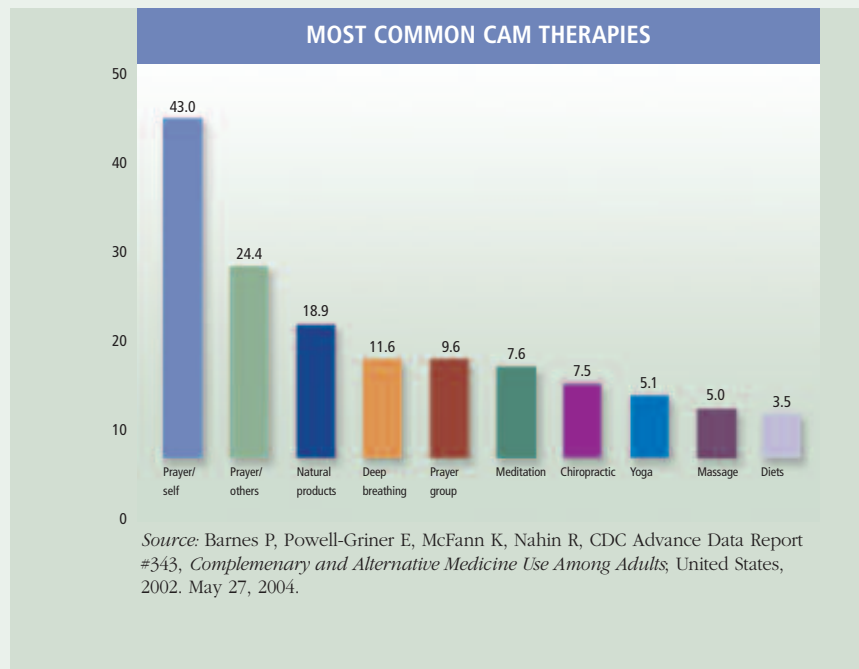
More and more Americans are turning to CAM to help manage and treat various health problems, including pain and distress.

- An estimated 36% of American adults use some form of CAM, and this percentage jumps to 62% if prayer for health reasons and megavitamin therapy are included.³
- Americans spend at least \$34-47 billion on CAM therapies, exceeding out of pocket expenses for all U.S. hospitalizations. CAM is expected to grow by 15% each year.³
- People report using CAM because these methods mirror their personal beliefs, values and philosophical orientations toward life.⁴
- Many people use CAM to help relieve back pain, joint pain, severe headache and pain associated with migraines, dental and jaw pain and for a variety of other reasons.⁴

Barriers to Fully Integrating CAM

Despite CAM's growing popularity, there are barriers to its widespread use. According to CAM experts, these include:

- Limited scientific evidence about the safety and effectiveness of certain therapies. Studies are underway to research specific CAM practices for pain management.
- Lack of professional training in CAM and integrative medicine and limited resources to coordinate services.
- Restricted health insurance coverage. Many CAM therapies are not yet covered by health insurance carriers and are, therefore, only available to patients on an outpatient fee-for-service basis. Insurers tend to restrict reimbursement to “medically necessary” therapies and without the data to back up their effectiveness, these practices are not covered.



- Lack of education (on the part of consumers and providers) about the appropriate use of CAM therapies and how best to integrate them with standard pain treatments.

- Misperceptions about CAM therapies as “elusive, nonsensical options.”

Source: American Pain Foundation, *Pain Community News*, Spring 2008.

Paying for non-drug therapies

The majority of CAM treatments are not currently covered by traditional insurance plans, largely due to the absence of scientific evidence proving the effectiveness of some CAM therapies. When coverage for CAM is offered, it is generally limited to more common therapies such as acupuncture and massage. Most people must pay for CAM services out-of-pocket; however, consumer interest has prompted more insurance companies to consider CAM coverage.

A study in Washington State, where private health insurers are legally required to cover licensed CAM providers, found that a significant number of people were utilizing CAM insurance benefits with only a modest effect on insurance expenditures.⁵

Given the high cost and low insurance coverage of many CAM therapies, it is important that patients, especially those that are no longer able to work,

have access to low cost, at-home therapies that provide effective pain relief. These may include heat and cold therapies, relaxation techniques and exercise.

People living with chronic pain are increasingly turning to CAM to help alleviate their suffering and improve their quality of life. The addition of these therapies often results in better pain relief and fewer side effects. However, more research is needed to prove the effectiveness of certain therapies and increase the likelihood that they will be covered by conventional insurance providers and offered as an option to all patients living with pain.

With nearly half of all consumers concerned about the safety of their health care,⁶ the use of CAM and other non-drug treatments for pain management is expected to grow as non-drug therapies are proven safe and effective and adopted into routine health care.⁷

For a snapshot of recent research on select CAM therapies, see the Spring 2008 issue of *Pain Community News* at www.painfoundation.org.

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WEB RESOURCES

American Academy of Pain Management
www.aapainmanage.org

American Pain Foundation Treatment Options
www.painfoundation.org/Publications/TreatmentOptions2006.pdf

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)
www.nccam.nih.gov

The Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine
www.cancer.gov/cam

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