

14e Complementary, Alternative, and Integrative Health Practices

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The search for health includes many beliefs and practices that are outside conventional medicine. Physicians are important sources for information and guidance about health matters, but our patients also rely on a wide range of other sources including family and friends, cultural traditions, alternative practitioners, and increasingly the Internet, popular media, and advertising. It is essential for physicians to understand what patients are doing to seek health, as this understanding is important to harness potential benefits and to help patients avoid harm.

DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

The phrase *complementary and alternative medicine* is used to describe a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that have historic origins outside mainstream medicine. Most of these practices are used together with conventional therapies and

therefore have been called *complementary* to distinguish them from *alternative* practices, those used as a substitute for standard care. Use of dietary supplements; mind-body practices such as acupuncture, massage, meditation, and hypnosis; and care from a traditional healer all fall under this umbrella. Brief definitions for some of the common complementary and alternative health practices are provided in **Table 14e-1**. Although some complementary health practices are implemented by a complementary health care provider such as a chiropractor, acupuncturist, or naturopathic practitioner, or by a physician, many of these practices are undertaken as “self-care.” Most are paid for out of pocket.

In the last decade or so, the terms *integrative care* and *integrative medicine* have entered the dialogue. A 2007 national survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics found that 42% of hospices had integrated complementary health practices into the care they provide. Integration of select complementary approaches is also common in Veterans Administration and Department of Defense facilities, particularly as part of management of pain and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The term *integrative medicine* is usually used to refer to a style of practice that places strong emphasis on a holistic approach to patient care while focusing on reduced use of technology. Physicians advocating

TABLE 14e-1 TERMINOLOGY OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICAL PRACTICES

Mind-Body Practices	
Acupuncture and acupressure	A family of procedures involving stimulation of defined anatomic points, a component of the major Asian medical traditions; most common application involves the insertion and manipulation of thin metallic needles
Alexander technique	A movement therapy that uses guidance and education to improve posture, movement, and efficient use of muscles for improvement of overall body functioning
Guided imagery	The use of relaxation techniques followed by the visualization of images, usually calm and peaceful in nature, to invoke specific images to alter neurologic function or physiologic states
Hypnosis	The induction of an altered state of consciousness characterized by increased responsiveness to suggestion
Massage	Manual therapies that manipulate muscle and connective tissues to promote muscle relaxation, healing, and sense of well-being
Meditation	A group of practices, largely based in Eastern spiritual traditions, intended to focus or control attention and obtain greater awareness of the present moment, or mindfulness
Reflexology	Manual stimulation of points on hands or feet that are believed to affect organ function
Rolfing/structural integration	A manual therapy that attempts to realign the body by deep tissue manipulation of fascia
Spinal manipulation	A range of manual techniques, employed by chiropractors and osteopaths, for adjustments of the spine to affect neuromuscular function and other health outcomes
Tai chi	A mind-body practice originating in China that involves slow, gentle movements and sometimes is described as “moving meditation”
Therapeutic touch	Secular version of the laying on of hands, described as “healing meditation”
Yoga	An exercise practice, originally East Indian, that combines breathing exercises, physical postures, and meditation
Traditional Medical Systems	
Ayurvedic medicine	The major East Indian traditional medicine system; treatment includes meditation, diet, exercise, herbs, and elimination regimens (using emetics and diarrheals)
Curanderismo	A spiritual healing tradition common in Latin American communities that uses ritual cleansing, herbs, and incantations
Native American medicine	Diverse traditional systems that incorporate chanting, shaman healing ceremonies, herbs, laying on of hands, and smudging (ritual cleansing with smoke from sacred plants)
Siddha medicine	An East Indian medical system (prevalent among Tamil-speaking people)
Tibetan medicine	A medical system that uses diagnosis by pulse and urine examination; therapies include herbs, diet, and massage
Traditional Chinese medicine	A medical system that uses acupuncture, herbal mixtures, massage, exercise, and diet
Unani medicine	An East Indian medical system, derived from Persian medicine, practiced primarily in the Muslim community; also called “hikmat”
“Modern” Medical Systems	
Anthroposophic medicine	A spiritually based system of medicine that incorporates herbs, homeopathy, diet, and a movement therapy called eurythmy
Chiropractic	Chiropractic care involves the adjustment of the spine and joints to alleviate pain and improve general health; primarily used to treat back problems, musculoskeletal complaints, and headaches
Homeopathy	A medical system with origins in Germany that is based on a core belief in the theory of “like cures like”—compounds that produce certain syndromes, if administered in very diluted solutions, will be curative
Naturopathy	A clinical discipline that emphasizes a holistic approach to the patient, herbal medications, diet, and exercise; practitioners have degrees as doctors of naturopathy
Osteopathy	A clinical discipline, now incorporated into mainstream medicine, that historically emphasized spinal manipulative techniques to relieve pain, restore function, and promote overall health