

Treating pain with integrative medicine

By Erin Jones

Did you know that more than 30 percent of adults use health care approaches outside of mainstream Western or conventional medicine? You may have heard the terms complementary, alternative, and integrative medicine—but what do they really mean?

Integrative medicine brings conventional and complementary approaches together and takes the whole person into account: body, mind, and spirit, with the goal of improved health and wellness.



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This marrying of concepts can include supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs, and probiotics), acupuncture, mind-body medicine, and physical manipulations like chiropractic and massage therapy.

Pain management is one area in which integrative medicine is often used. The most common conditions targeted are back pain, neck pain, joint pain, and arthritis. In my practice, I consider both conventional and alternative therapies valuable and appropriate options.

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

is the federal government's lead agency in defining the usefulness and safety of complementary health interventions based on scientific research. Some alternative methods are still in the early research stages, though many methods have been studied and are proven to be beneficial.

Recent research suggests that chronic pain can affect the brain's anatomy. Pain can impair central nerve pathways, leading to a "negative feedback loop" in which people experience more pain and subsequent problems with emotions and reasoning.

Mind-body practices such as meditation, relaxation, and yoga are safe and helpful treatments for chronic pain and other conditions like depression and anxiety. Studies suggest that mind-body practices could help reverse brain changes associated with chronic pain and may have protective effects on the brain.

If you're taking any supplements, be sure to let your doctors know. Supplements can play a role in your treatment, but they also can interfere with other medications or your underlying medical conditions.

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