



How Healthcare Professionals Integrate Alternative Medicine

What is Integrative Medicine?

Healthcare providers use the term "integrative" to describe the blending of modern medicine with unconventional or ancient techniques, such as:

- **Homeopathy** — The use of infinitesimal doses of natural substances to stimulate the body's healing systems.
- **Nutritional Therapy** — Includes macrobiotic diets for cancer patients as well as general attempts to increase one's well being through nutrients found in foods.
- **Herbal Remedies** — The world's most common medicine, herbal remedies use plants to treat specific conditions or enhance overall health.
- **Acupuncture** — An ancient Chinese technique in which fine, sterile needles are inserted in the skin to relieve pain and stimulate healing.
- **Massage Therapy** — Stimulates muscles, nerves, and the circulatory and lymphatic systems to manage pain, reduce stress, and aid post-op recovery.
- **Mind-Body Work** — Meditation, hypnosis, energy healing, biofeedback, yoga, t'ai chi, guided imagery, and visualization: all used to relieve pain and manage stress.

How prevalent is the use of alternative medicine techniques in the U.S.?

Currently, one out of three Americans turn to alternative healers; visits to holistic healers now outnumber visits to conventional doctors. The National Institutes of Health now recommend that all medical and nursing students be exposed to alternative theories and techniques to be aware of the choices consumers make and the impacts of those choices on treatment plans.

A number of major hospitals and university medical centers are beginning to incorporate the principles of integrative medicine. For example, at Case Western University, guided imagery, biofeedback, and other stress reduction techniques are being studied and used to treat conditions ranging from migraines to cancer and heart disease. At the Portsmouth Regional Hospital, the use of Reiki techniques (a form of energy healing) has significantly reduced the requests for pain medication in post-operative patients.

What can physicians expect from qualified alternative medicine providers?

Good integrative providers are willing to work together with a patient's entire healthcare team to ensure the safest, most-effective treatment plan possible. They offer somewhere for the physician's patients to go for good treatment by well trained and educated practitioners who will *COMPLEMENT, NOT SABOTAGE*, the physician's treatment plan. These providers want a patient's physicians involved in the alternative approaches they select and work to educate patients on the importance of keeping all parties informed of treatments selected.

How do the client's relationships with integrative providers impact healing?

The relationship between client and healthcare provider can strongly influence the healing process. In the ideal client/provider relationship, the healing process is viewed as a working partnership in which both parties respect the knowledge and intuition of the other. Thus, the integrative provider, who demonstrates a respect for and knowledge of both alternative and traditional medical approaches, promotes health through a positive attitude about the healing choices the client makes.

What does the future hold for integrating alternative with traditional medicine?

Many integrative medicine practitioners believe that the present Western medical model will become a subset of the holistic and integrative medicine of the future. As patients recover from surgery, trauma, and illness, they can be taught skills to speed up the body's healing process, reduce pain, and reflect upon those changes necessary to improve the quality of their lives. The goal will not be to simply remove the symptom but to help the person attain a greater state of wholeness a lifelong process.