

# Alternative Health – A New Look at an Old Way of Life

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Alternative health options can include anything from natural herbs used to treat sunburns to using acupuncture for controlling excruciating pain. It's been around in one form or another for thousands of years and its beginnings are generally attributed to the Chinese.

Traditional Chinese medicine asserts that the human body and the environment are closely related and when the body's rhythms are upset, treatment and ultimate prevention can come from the environment.

Herbs and other plants are widely used in Chinese medicine to bring balance back to the body. Meditation, acupuncture and massage are used in conjunction with the mind and to bring harmony to the body.

According to the Chinese, the forces in the universe are believed to affect everything in life, including our health. These forces are represented by the symbol of yin and yang, the two most powerful cosmic forces in the universe.

Yin is the female force and is represented by the moon, while yang represents the masculine force and is represented by the sun. From these ancient beliefs, the Chinese developed a technology for health care that in many ways rivals that of Western medicine.

These alternatives methods were initially thought to be "quackery," but as scientific evidence surfaced to prove otherwise, the early ways of thinking had to be reconsidered.

That scientific evidence has been difficult to come by. The huge drug companies aren't going to put costly research efforts into techniques that won't bring in piles of money.

It wasn't until the mid-1990s that funding for alternative medicine began to appear in academic circles. Since then, it's become a form of therapy and healing that's widely accepted around the world.

## ***Concepts of Eastern Medicine***

To understand Eastern medicine concepts, you must first understand the "Eastern society." It's a society steeped in tradition and social interaction with centuries behind it. Yin and yang have long been a part of that tradition and one of the premises of Eastern medicine is that yin and yang divide our bodies into regions.

Our internal organs are considered to be yin, while yang represents our external organs (such as our skin). The foods, including herbs that we eat, contain universal elements that help to stabilize our bodies.

If we eat the correct combination of yin and yang foods, our bodies will be in balance. Most illnesses are the result of us **not** eating the proper foods and **not** exercising and resting our bodies and minds.

If you eat an excess of either yin or yang foods, even though they're "good" for you, your balance will be disrupted and illnesses or aches and pains may occur. Besides eating the proper foods to balance our bodies, Eastern culture developed exercises such as Tai Chi.

Tai Chi is an exercise in which you move slowly to promote balance and equilibrium. Both this exercise and others, such as yoga, also advances increased blood flow.

## ***Combining Alternative Methods with Western Technology***

Western medicine has been slow in accepting Chinese and other alternative methods of healing and disease prevention, but most physicians educated in the west are now combining the techniques they learned in medical school with some of the known benefits of alternative medicine.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, a prominent surgeon frequently seen on the popular Oprah Winfrey Show, recently said that he uses the Eastern methods of reflexology and massage on each of his patients that undergo surgery.

Dr. Oz said that he's found the healing process after surgery to be accelerated when using these techniques. He's certainly not the only one to embrace this valuable way of thinking as more surgeons look to therapies such as Reiki to help their patients heal.

Reiki, an Asian energy therapy, is said to help put the body back into balance after a serious illness or surgery. This tradition requires a therapist who is trained on how to touch 12 to 15 points on the body to help relieve pain and stress associated with an illness or surgery.

Chinese research has recently said that combining Western and Eastern medical techniques was a good thing for both the patient and medical research in general. For example, research shows that a combination of Chinese herbs and radiation therapy for cancer patients can greatly reduce the number of tumors and enhance the immune system while receiving radiation.

Also contained in the Chinese research reports was proof that acupuncture does affect the central nervous system by releasing endorphins (pleasure hormones) from the brain and other areas of the body.

These hormones are known to promote the health of the organs in our bodies. The simple act of daily meditation can promote immune system defense cells such as T-Cells that kill harmful viruses.

Critics claim that many Chinese therapies (such as meditation) are the result of the placebo effect, but little by little, new findings from both Western and Eastern sources are proving them wrong.

In order to combine the best of both the Western and Eastern philosophies, an understanding must be reached that addresses lifestyle. The Eastern philosophy embraces prevention of disease by cultivating a

more healthful lifestyle through diet and exercise, whereas the Western philosophy tends to treat illnesses only after they appear, with little thought to prevention or psychological support.

Now, more physicians are combining traditional Chinese medicine and other alternative methods with Western medicine techniques to help their patients. It's believed that over one-third of Americans use some type of alternative medicine practice to complement conventional medical practices.

Studies and research are happening every day that justify taking a much closer look at alternative methods for health care. You can tune into the news daily to learn of yet another positive aspect to using alternative health therapies to promote and maintain your health.

### ***What Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Can Do For You***

Complementary and alternative medicine is the combined use of medical practices and products that aren't a part of conventional medicine. Many are using the CAM approach in hopes that they can prevent disease and live a more enhanced quality of life.

People often turn to CAM because conventional medical techniques aren't always successful in treating chronic health conditions and psychological behaviors. The lack of proper insurance coverage is also a factor in more and more people turning to CAM.

CAM is based on both provider and non-provider therapies. The provider therapies include reflexology and acupuncture and the non-provider therapies include herbal remedies, certain types of exercise and meditation.

A complementary and alternative approach to your health can help you get in touch with your personal power and become the best person you can be, both in mind and body.

If you're hurting physically or not mentally alert, life can begin to pass you by and you may find yourself in the proverbial rut. The ancient findings of Eastern medicine, combined with our modern technology, can lead the way back to physical fitness and mental alertness.

Some types of healing therapies and treatments that you might want to consider are:

- **Aromatherapy** – A type of therapy that involves essential oils derived from herbs, plants and flowers. The aromatherapy treatments may include massage, baths or inhalation therapies.
- **Acupuncture** – A professional acupuncturist inserts long, thin needles just under the skin in particular areas of the body. This therapy can help relieve pain and help your mind relax or get rid of bad habits, such as smoking. It's usually completely painless.
- **Herbal remedies** – Involves the use of natural herbs to relieve or cure maladies such as sunburn, colds, flu, headaches and other symptoms.
- **Exercise** – Yoga, a series of exercises that promote deep breathing and stretching as well as cardiovascular fitness, is very much a part of the Eastern theory of keeping your body fit as a way to ward off illnesses and fight them if they do occur.
- **Natural diet** – A proper diet of the yin and yang foods can help maintain your weight and also promote mental alertness. A natural diet consists of the “common sense” foods that we all know are good for us, such as fruit, vegetables, grains that are unrefined and unprocessed, legumes and nuts.
- **Massage and Reflexology** – These therapies are relaxation and healing techniques that help increase circulation and relieve tense and tight muscles.

Until a few years ago, little information could be found on this growing healthcare field. Now, an astounding amount of alternative

medicine books have been written and are continuing to appear in book stores all over the world.

A simple search on the Internet will also reveal scientific studies as well as informative articles about alternative health care and what it can do for you.

### ***Comparing Costs of Medical vs. Alternative Methods***

Another reason that alternative methods of treating illnesses are becoming so popular, especially among Westerners, is the high cost of traditional medical care. Everyone is talking about it, but no one seems to know the answer to how we can treat thousands of people without health insurance.

Health care costs are simply too steep for small businesses to offer their employees - and even more comprehensive healthcare plans that some large companies offer are inadequate.

In the United States, those in need of prescription medications are crossing the borders of Canada and Mexico, where drug costs are markedly lower. As the benefits and lower costs of alternative medicine become better known throughout the world, more people will begin to try the methods in their daily life to maintain balance and will seek out alternative healthcare providers who believe in its benefits.

### ***The Bottom Line About Alternative Medicine Therapies***

Skeptics are still around who say that alternative medicine is a fraud, but they're now few and far between. Academic medical centers such as Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago are adapting certain alternative medicine techniques into their programs.

U.S. News and World Report recently published an article on alternative medicines and wrote that Children's Memorial is usually a "hard-nosed, tough-cases, research-oriented emblem of western medicine."

When a teaching hospital such as this begins to allow alternative therapies to coincide with their traditional western theories, others tend to jump on the bandwagon and create their own balance of West and East.

Most physicians today agree that alternative techniques such as yoga, massage and reflexology play a vital role in our daily lives to keep our health on track. In general, the Chinese believe that a combination of Western and Eastern remedies to treat chronic diseases, like cancer - but few Westerners have given that theory a chance.

It's also important to realize that the Western healthcare system treats many people who may not be as open to the Eastern way of thinking about healthcare options. The very words, "alternative medicine," conjure up witchcraft and religious connotations that many find distasteful and downright scary.

In time, and with help from both Chinese and American understanding, each can benefit from cross-cultural communication and can take the confidence level of the people to a higher plane.

The bottom line in healthcare is that we need to provide ***the best treatment or therapy for the patient***, and as we cross cultural lines and begin to understand the philosophical framework of Western and Eastern medical practices, we'll bring new and better methods of treatment to the world.



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