

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

CAM: Complementary and Alternative Medicine

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMPLEMENTARY and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) defines CAM as “a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine.” Medicinenet.com defines “conventional medicine” as “Medicine as practiced by holders of M.D. (medical doctor) or D.O. (doctor of osteopathy) degrees and by their allied health professionals, such as physical therapists, psychologists, and registered nurses.” Some other terms for conventional medicine are Western medicine, mainstream medicine, modern medicine, and allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine focuses on treatment of diseases.

Complementary Medicine is used *with* conventional medicine. Alternative medicine is used *instead* of conventional medicine. Many forms of medicine have rich traditions and have been practiced for centuries. Aspects of other traditions are being integrated into conventional medicine making it harder to draw clear lines between what is conventional and what is not. Health insurance companies are seeing the value in some types of CAM. Reimbursement for chiropractics and acupuncture is common.

If you pursue CAM options, be informed and proceed safely. Ask your medical provider and/ or other acquaintances to recommend well-regarded CAM experts. Never take herbs or other supplements without first discussing this with your primary medical provider. Tell your CAM practitioner if you have hepatitis C or any other serious or potentially infectious diseases.

Acupuncture

This healing practice is from China and has been used for centuries. It is based on the belief that energy flows through the body and that disease occurs if energy is blocked or out of balance. Slender needles are inserted into anatomical points in order to stimulate energy. Acupuncture is one of many tools used by practitioners of Traditional Chinese and Oriental Medicine. Practitioners should use sterile, single-use needles. Many insurance companies cover treatment.

Ayurveda

An ancient system from India that focuses on healthy living. Based on the belief that humans consist of three life forces, health problems arise when these forces are out of balance. Ayurveda uses diet, herbs, yoga, meditation, and self-knowledge to prevent and treat disease.

Body Work and Massage

There are many types of massage. Some examples are:

- **Acupressure** – Applies pressure to the same anatomical points used in acupuncture.
- **Aromatherapy massage** – Combines various scents with massage, usually with scented oils.
- **Foot reflexology** – Applies pressure to points on the feet that correspond to parts of the body.
- **Shiatsu** – A Japanese technique that literally means “pressure with fingers.” Shiatsu is based on similar foundations used in acupuncture and acupressure.
- **Watsu** – A technique performed in water that uses shiatsu, acupressure, and gentle movement.

Chiropractics

This uses a whole body approach emphasizing body structure and spinal alignment. Problems occur when the spine is misaligned. Chiropractors manipulate the body and use other interventions to correct problems. Many insurance plans include chiropractic coverage.

Curanderos, Shamans, and Folk Medicine

Many ethnic groups have their own traditional healing arts. These are sometimes called shamans or medicine men and women. *Curanderos*, Spanish for “healers,” are common in Mexico, parts of Central America and the United States. Curanderos have been practicing for hundreds of years. Curanderos use many techniques, such as massage, plants and prayer. There are indigenous folk healers all over the world, some of whom have immigrated to the U.S. and have brought their traditions with them.

Herbal Medicine

This practice uses herbs and other botanicals for the treatment and prevention of various medical problems. Not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, these substances are classified as “dietary supplements.” Herbal medicine is also used to help with the side effects of chemotherapy and other medical treatments.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is based on the “laws of similars” and “let likes cure likes.” The belief is that balance is restored when minute amounts of substances are orally ingested. Higher doses of the same substance would cause rather than cure those symptoms. This system has been used for at least 200 years.

Naturopathic Medicine

While placing a strong emphasis on prevention, naturopaths are trained to use many types of therapies. Naturopaths use a multi-disciplinary approach from many of the healing arts. Treatment can include medicinal herbs, homeopathy, acupuncture, massage, and dietary supplements, to name a few.

Osteopathic Medicine

Osteopaths are medical doctors who have completed medical school, a residency, and licensing exams. They have the initials “D.O.” after their name rather than “M.D.” In most parts of the world, they can practice surgery, deliver babies, and prescribe medications. Although the practice encompasses the whole person, osteopathic doctors believe that diseases can be treated by focusing on dysfunctions in the musculoskeletal system. Osteopaths are specially trained in techniques for manipulating the body to restore health. This treatment is covered by most insurance plans.

Prayer and Faith Healing

This practice uses prayer and spiritual rituals in order to restore health and well-being. Many religions have a rich tradition of the use of prayer for healing.

Reiki

This Asian art focuses on healing a patient’s physical maladies by focusing on spiritual healing. In this practice, the Reiki practitioner channels “universal life energy” to the patient. No pressure is applied to the body and sometimes there is no physical contact.

Therapeutic Touch (TT)

This is a modern approach using an old concept. TT was developed by a nurse and has attracted the attention of other nurses

and other practitioners. Humans are seen as having complex fields of energy which can disturb health if balance is disrupted. Light or no touch is used to sense energy imbalances and to restore harmony.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Simply stated, TCM views the body as having *qi* (pronounced chee), which is energy flowing throughout the body. Health problems develop when *qi* is blocked and disharmony occurs. Practitioners use many tools to restore energy flow. Examples of treatment include acupuncture, massage, and herbs. *Tai Qi* or *Tai Chi* and *Qigong* are two of the many “physical” practices that are offered in TCM. These Asian arts combine meditation and movement with the goal of restoring balance. Chinese medicine has gathered strong support in this country.

Yoga

There are over a hundred different types of yoga. In this country, Hatha yoga is one of the most familiar types. It uses physical movements, postures, and breathing to restore and maintain physical, mental, and spiritual health.


For more information see the following HCSP Factsheets:

- *Hepatitis C and CAM: Information and Finding a Practitioner*
- *Hepatitis C and CAM: Complementary and Alternative Medicine Resources*

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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