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Integrative Medicine

Integrative medicine helps maximize wellness for people with chronic and complex diseases. It combines conventional and complementary medicine practices. Care may include chiropractic care, yoga and meditation.

APPOINTMENTS & ACCESS
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Procedure Details | Risks / Benefits | Recovery and Outlook | When to Call the Doctor

OVERVIEW

What is integrative medicine?

Integrative medicine is an approach to wellness that combines:

- **Conventional (traditional Western) medicine,** which includes drugs, surgery and lifestyle changes.
- **Complementary medicine,** therapies that are not part of traditional Western medicine. Care may include chiropractic therapy, yoga, meditation and more.

What type of provider delivers integrative medicine?

You receive care from an individual practitioner or a team of providers, representing:

Traditional Western medicine: Providers who have completed formal medical training deliver conventional therapies. This approach focuses on evidence-based care. You may receive services from:

- Medical doctors (MD).
- Doctors of osteopathy (DO).
- Physician assistants (PA).
- Nurse practitioners (NP).

Complementary medicine: Healers may come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are board-certified in integrative medicine, meaning they passed rigorous exams. Others are licensed therapists.

They may be:

- Doctors of chiropractic or naturopathic medicine.
- Massage therapists.
- Energy healers.
- Acupuncturists.

How can integrative medicine help me?

Integrative medicine uses a variety of techniques to deliver whole-person care. Complementary therapies work with traditional treatments to heal your mind, body and spirit.

Complementary therapies do not replace conventional treatments. They help you cope with symptoms, complications or side effects.

Who is integrative medicine for?

Many patients can benefit from integrative medicine. People with long-lasting (chronic) or complex medical conditions are particularly likely to benefit from these approaches. They may be living with:

Physical ailments

- Asthma.
- Cancer.
- Chronic pain.
- Diabetes.
- Fibromyalgia.
- Headaches.
- Infertility.
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
- Joint pain.
- Multiple sclerosis.
- Nausea.
- Neck pain.
- Sciatica.

Mental illness

- Addiction.
- Anxiety disorders.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Depression.
- Insomnia.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PROCEDURE DETAILS

What types of complementary therapies are available?

There are many complementary therapies, including:

Natural remedies

This treatment includes substances found in nature that help maximize nutrient levels. Natural remedies include:

- **Diet therapy** improves wellness with specific eating plans. They include paleo, Mediterranean, keto, plant-based or other diets.
- **Herbal supplements** are natural substances with healing properties. They come from plant oils, roots, seeds, berries or flowers.
- **Probiotics** contain good bacteria that support your digestive and immune systems.
- **Vitamins** are minerals and other substances that are essential for good health.

Mind-body practices

Mind-body practices harness the connection between mental and physical dimensions of health. They include:

- **Biofeedback** helps you gain better awareness of specific body functions.
- **Hypnotherapy** heightens your sense of awareness and openness to suggestion.
- **Meditation** uses mental focus to quiet unpleasant thoughts and feelings.
- **Reiki (energy healing)** restores the body's energy fields to promote healing.
- **Yoga and tai chi** combine specific postures and movements with breathing to unify your mind and body.

Bodywork

These therapies use the body to influence health and well-being. Bodywork may include:

- **Acupuncture** uses thin needles to stimulate the flow of energy qi.
- **Chiropractic adjustments** use a healer's hands to ease joints back into their natural position.
- **Reflexology** stimulates body systems by pressing on areas of the hands, feet or ears.
- **Therapeutic massage** applies pressure to muscles and soft tissue to relieve tightness.

RISKS / BENEFITS

What are the benefits of integrative medicine?

Integrative medicine maximizes well-being with:

- **Disease-focused therapies** of traditional Western medicine.
- **Healing opportunities** from complementary therapies.

Complementary therapies may help people living with complex illnesses achieve:

- Better appetite.
- Improved cognitive functioning, which makes it easier to remember things.
- Peace of mind.
- Relief from pain, nausea or fatigue.
- Restful sleep.

What are the risks of integrative medicine?

Potential risks include:

- **Complex care plans:** Integrative medicine often involves care from two or more providers. This can include many appointments to keep up with therapies.
- **Conflicting recommendations:** Complementary therapies and traditional Western medicine have different philosophies. Providers may disagree on the best course of care.
- **Complications and interactions:** Some complementary therapies have side effects. They may also interact with conventional treatments. In some cases, they can be life-threatening.

RECOVERY AND OUTLOOK

What is the outlook for people receiving integrative medicine?

Your outlook depends on your diagnosis, health history and treatments you receive. You can improve the likelihood of good results by:

- Learning about complementary therapies that may be appropriate for you.
- Discussing risks and benefits with your conventional healthcare and complementary medicine providers.
- Keeping in mind that complementary therapies are not meant to replace conventional treatments.
- Always letting your healthcare provider know about any complementary therapies you receive.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

When should I contact my healthcare provider about integrative medicine?

You should be in contact with your healthcare provider throughout treatment. Letting them know about the complementary therapies you are receiving helps them tailor care to keep you safe.

A note from Cleveland Clinic

Integrative medicine combines conventional treatments and complementary therapies. This approach eases discomfort and promotes healing in people with complex diseases. Your care may include acupuncture, bodywork, supplements and more. These therapies can have side effects or affect your response to conventional therapies. Maintaining open communication with all your providers and healers can help you get the most out of treatment.

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References

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