

About 70 Percent of Older Adults Use Alternative Medicine

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While previous research has been limited, this appears to be a higher rate than occurs within the general population, said Gong-Soog Hong, co-author of the study and professor of consumer sciences at Ohio State University.

This study found that 71 percent of older adults used some form of alternative medicine in 2000. A study done in 2002, found a lower rate -- about 62 percent -- among all adults. "The percentage of older adults who used alternative medicine was higher than I expected," Hong said.

"Many types of alternative medicine have not been tested for safety and effectiveness, and yet a large majority of older adults are using them. This tells us there is a serious need for more consumer education."

Hong conducted the study with Catherine Montalto, associate professor, and Vibha Bhargava, a graduate student, both in consumer sciences at Ohio State. They presented their research April 9 in Columbus at the annual meeting of the American Council on Consumer Interests.

The researchers used data from the 2000 Health and Retirement Survey, conducted by the University of Michigan and funded mainly by the National Institute on Aging. The survey included 848 respondents aged 50 and over.

The survey asked about the use of six types of alternative medicine: chiropractor, acupuncture, massage therapy, breathing exercises, herbal medicine, and meditation. The most commonly used form of alternative medicine was chiropractor, which about 43 percent of respondents had used. Acupuncture was the least used.

Some of the results will need more research to explain, Hong said. For example, the findings showed Blacks, widows, and more religious people all tended to use alternative medicine more often than did other older adults.

Other results were more readily understandable.

Respondents were more likely to use alternative medicine if they said they were in poor health and if they reported more problems with daily activities, such as carrying groceries, eating or bathing.

Of those who described their health as poor, 65 percent said they used some form of alternative medicine they considered preventive or curative – a higher percentage than among any other group. And about 63 percent of respondents who said they were not satisfied with their health care also tried alternative therapies classified as preventive or curative.

“Older adults tend to have more chronic illnesses, and conventional medicine doesn’t always solve their problems,” Hong said.

The aches and pains that often come with age may also send more older adults to search for different kinds of treatments.

“Treatment of chronic pain is very difficult,” she said. “People who are living with pain will try everything possible to alleviate it. Those taking a holistic approach toward life may try something else such as alternative medicine.”

However, the exact reasons why these older adults used alternative medicine is not known from this research and needs further study, Hong said. The fact that those who were less satisfied with their health care were more likely to use alternative medicine does suggest some people have issues with the current state of conventional health care. Hong said the medical establishment has begun studying alternative medicine and has begun to accept some forms of non-traditional medicine. But more study needs to be done before they are generally accepted.

“Many people are using herbal medicines or massage therapy or other treatments based on what they read in popular magazines or see on television,” Hong said.

“More scientific research is needed to examine the safety and effectiveness of alternative medicines, especially about possible interaction effects when they are used along with prescription drugs.”

Hong and her colleagues are working on a new study that will take a more comprehensive look at what alternative medicines people are using and how often they are using them.

“Alternative medicine provides an important option in response to the need for health care in the United States,” Hong said. “We need to know more about who is using alternative medicine and ensuring that they are educated about the medicines and therapies they are using.”

Alternative Medicine means any form of medicine that is outside the mainstream of western medicine. There are more than 100 systems of alternative medicines which are still in practice all over the world. Some of the very popular systems are Ayurveda, Acupuncture, Naturopathy, Yoga, Acupressure, Magnetotherapy, Indo-Allopathy, Electro

Homoeopathy, Biochemic, Bach Flower Remedies, Gem & Teletherapy, Aroma Therapy, Reiki, Spiritual Healing, Oriental Diagnosis & therapy & Music Therapy etc.

After decades of serious obsession with modern medicine, recently there has been a boom in various systems of alternative medicines and more and more people in general and patients in particular are opting for these traditional systems of maintaining health and curing diseases. One of the most important reasons for this renewed interest is the increasing side-effects and spiraling cost of western medicines.

Salient Features of Alternative Medicines :

- Considers the human body as a whole, being i.e. the sum total of its physical, mental, social & spiritual dimensions.
- No side effects.
- Remedies are based on natural ingredients or a drugless.
- Low cost.
- Simple to prescribe and practice.
- Preventive and promotive aspects of health are equally cared for.
- Permanent cures for many a so called incurable and chronic diseases.
- Faith of the people.

Acupressure

Similar to acupuncture, but using finger pressure rather than fine needles on specific points along the body to treat ailments such as tension and stress, aches and pains, menstrual cramps, arthritis.

Acupuncture

Fine needles are inserted at specific points to stimulate, disperse, and regulate the flow of vital energy, and restore a healthy energy balance. In addition to pain relief, acupuncture is also used to improve well being and treat acute, chronic, and degenerative conditions in children and adults.

Aromatherapy

Using "essential oils" distilled from plants, aromatherapy treats emotional disorders such as stress and anxiety as well as a wide range of other ailments. Oils are massaged into the skin in diluted form, inhaled, or placed in baths. Aromatherapy is often used in conjunction with massage therapy, acupuncture, reflexology, herbology, chiropractic, and other holistic treatments.

Ayurveda

Practiced in India for more than 5,000 years, ayurvedic tradition holds that illness is a state of imbalance among the body's systems that can be detected through such diagnostic procedures as reading the pulse and observing the tongue. Nutrition counseling, massage, natural medications, meditation, and other modalities are used to address a broad spectrum of ailments.

Bach Flower Remedy

In this system the healing of physical disorders is done by treatment of mental & emotional problems like depression, worry etc. This system was invented by Dr. Edward Bach who classified people into 12 archetypes, each with a habitual negative emotional state indicated by a key word such as loneliness and fear. Dr. Bach set out the plants that made these states positive. He called them "The Twelve Healer" and eventually found 26 others "The Helpers" making 38 remedies in all.

Biochemic Medicines

This system of treatment was invented by Dr. Schussler of Germany and is based on 12 inorganic salts of the body as most of the diseases are associated with disturbances of one or more such salts. This system is very popular in western countries as well as in Asian countries where these salts are usually available in homoeopathic pharmacies.

Chinese (Oriental) Medicine

Oriental medical practitioners are trained to use a variety of ancient and modern therapeutic methods - including acupuncture, herbal medicine, massage, heat therapy, and nutritional and lifestyle counseling - to treat a broad range of both chronic and acute illnesses.

Chiropractic

The chiropractic views the spine as the backbone of human health: misalignments of the vertebrae caused by poor posture or trauma cause pressure on the spinal nerve roots, leading to diminished function and illness. Through manipulation or adjustment of the spine, treatment seeks to analyze and correct these misalignments.

Chromotherapy / Colour Therapy

It is an art of curing diseases by applying coloured lights to the body. This is also an ancient technique-but it disappeared in the past but now it is well established that colours effect body and mind in various ways. Techniques have been developed to catch colours and apply them for the use of the body for different ailments.

Dowsing

Dowsing is an ancient art of searching for hidden things (water, precious metals, etc) using one of the senses that many of us are not even aware of possessing; reportedly 80% of people have this special gift - an ability to sense things not perceptible to others. Some of these people do not need any extra tools to do that - they just KNOW where is the best place to dig a well or where the gold treasure is hidden.

Electro-Homoeopathy

The medicines are prepared by vegetables on specific process called "Spagiric Way" This medicines have maximum curing capacity by regulating the lymph and blood of the body and also keep them purified.

Feng Shui

Ancient Chinese practice of arranging the home or work environment to promote health, happiness, and prosperity. Consultants may recommend changes in the surroundings - from color selection to furniture placement - in order to promote a health flow of chi, or vital energy.

Gem Therapy

A relatively recent discovery in the field of alternative medicines, it involves the use of specific gems to treat specific ailments.

Herbalism

An ancient form of healing still widely used in much of the world, herbalism uses natural plants or plant-based substances to treat a range of illnesses and to enhance the functioning of the body's systems. Though herbalism is not a licensed professional modality in the United States, herbs are "prescribed" by a range of practitioners.

Holistic Medicine

A descriptive term for a healing philosophy that views a patient as a whole person, not as just a disease or a collection of symptoms. In the course of treatment, holistic medical practitioners may address a client's emotional and spiritual dimensions as well as the nutritional, environmental, and lifestyle factors that may contribute to an illness. Many holistic medical practitioners combine conventional forms of treatment with natural or alternative treatments.

Homoeopathy

A medical system that uses infinitesimal doses of natural substances - called remedies - to stimulate a person's immune and defense system. A remedy is individually chosen for a sick person based on its capacity to cause, if given in overdose, physical and psychological symptoms similar to those a patient is experiencing. Common conditions homeopathy addresses are infant and childhood diseases, infections, fatigue, allergies, and chronic illnesses such as arthritis.

Hydrotherapy

It is defined as the scientific application of water for therapeutic purposes. Water may be used at various temperatures, in different modes and in different forms.

Hypnotherapy

A means of bypassing the conscious mind and accessing the subconscious, where suppressed memories, repressed emotions, and forgotten events may remain recorded. Hypnosis may facilitate behavioral, emotional, or attitudinal change such as weight loss, or smoking cessation. It is also used to treat phobias, stress, and as an adjunct in the treatment of illness.

Indo - Allopathy

This system is based on integration of indigenous medicines with harmless, time tested & absolutely reliable allopathic medicines to cure sick persons.

Iridology

The diagnostic system based on the premise that every organ has a corresponding location within the iris of the eye, which can serve as an indicator of the individual organ's health or disease. Iridology is used by naturopaths and other practitioners, particularly when diagnosis achieved through standard methods is unclear.

Kinesiology

Kinesiology is the study of the human body during movement. There are many disciplines within Kinesiology including anatomy, biomechanics, exercise physiology, motor control, motor learning, neuromuscular physiology, sports psychology, and philosophy. Kinesiology graduates enter a variety of careers and graduate programs related to the understanding of how the body works including medical school, physical and occupational therapy schools, athletic training, and other health professions, public school teaching, sport and exercise related fields, the military, business, and law.

Magnetotherapy

The art of healing by the application of natural and artificial magnets to the diseased parts of the human body. It is a clinical system by which human ailments are treated and cured through the application of magnets to the body of the patients.

Massage Therapy

A general term for a range of therapeutic approaches with roots in both Eastern and Western cultures. It involves the practice of manipulating a person's muscles and other soft tissue with the intent of improving a person's well-being or health, and may include, but not be limited to, effleurage, deep tissue, percussion, vibration, and joint movement.

Medical Astrology

Astrology is a humanistic attempt at trying to understand the cycles that we share with the forces in the Universe. The planets have corresponding rulership to certain vitamins, minerals, cell salts, herbs, metals, colors and parts of the body. Through the chart, one can look to see what natal health conditions exist. Through these precepts, we can then look at the present and into the future to see what areas of our lives are being affected and potentially how we can head off ill health and promote wellness.

Naturopathy

Naturopathic physicians work to restore and support the body's own healing abilities using a variety of modalities including nutrition, herbal medicine, homeopathic medicine, and orient medicine. A primary health-care system which emphasizes the curative power of nature, treating both acute and chronic illnesses in all age groups.

Osteopathy

Osteopathic physicians provide comprehensive medical care, including preventive medicine, diagnosis, surgery, prescription medications, and hospital referrals. In diagnosis and treatment, they pay particular attention to the joints, bones, muscles, and nerves and are specially trained in osteopathic manipulative treatment - using their hands to diagnose, treat, and prevent illness.

Physiotherapy

It is a wonderful manipulative technique by which the deformities of an individual are modified in order to tonify the body and the vital organs in accordance with the principles of naturopathy.

Psychotherapy / Counseling

This broad category covers a range of practitioners, from career counselors to psychotherapies who treat depression, stress, addiction, and emotional issues. Formats can vary from individual counseling to group therapy. Some therapists may also incorporate bodywork, ritual, energy healing, and other alternative modalities as part of their practice.

Pyramid Healing

A potential healing method using pyramidal structures.

Radiesthesia

The use of dowsing or divining to diagnose disease and select remedies. It can be used to diagnose any condition according to leading practitioners. Basically, it is simply a method of arriving at a diagnosis and treatment using the human being as the diagnostic instrument.

Radionics

A therapy that has grown up around the ability of the human being to use radiesthesia together with simple instruments to help in the diagnosis of disease in animals, plants and humans and then to treat this disease at a distance without the presence of the patient.

Reflexology

This modality is based on the idea that specific points on the feet and hands correspond with organs and tissues throughout the body. With fingers and thumbs, the practitioner applies pressure to these points to treat a wide range of stress-related illnesses.

Reiki

Practitioners of this ancient Tibetan healing system use light hand placements to channel healing energies to the recipient. While practitioners may vary widely in technique and philosophy, Reiki is commonly used to treat emotional and mental distress as well as chronic and acute physical problems, and to assist the recipient in achieving spiritual focus and clarity.

Shiatsu

The most widely known form of accupressure, shiatsu has been used in Japan for more than 1,000 years to treat pain and illness and for general health maintenance. Using a series of techniques, practitioners apply rhythmic finger pressure at specific points on the body in order to stimulate chi, or the vital energy.

Tele Therapy

In this system the diseases are cured from a distance i.e. The doctors & the patients are at

different places. The doctor needs any belonging preferably a passport size photograph of the patient as there is an intimate relationship between individual & his photograph, because both have the same wavelength. Changes occurring in the individual are simultaneously taking place in the photograph. This truth has been realised recently.

Tibetan Medicine

Evolved as a synthesis of Tibetan, Chinese and Persian Medicine, and even Ayurveda. These remedies include indigenous herbs, fruits, flowers, metallic powders and minerals given in tablets, and are especially effected in treating rheumatism, asthma, gastritis, diabetes and many neurological disorders.

Unani

Involves the use of plants and herbs, these remedies are known to provide cures for diseases such as sinusitis, leucoderma, rheumatism, jaundice and elephantiasis.

Vitamin Therapy

A complementary therapy of vitamin usage combined with other treatments to address a range of illnesses and to enhance the functioning of the body's systems. Assists the immune system in combating diseases such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and HIV/AIDS.

Yoga Therapy

The use of yoga to address mental and physical problems while integrating body and mind.

Courtesy: Medical News Today