
THERAPIES: Common IM Treatments

Extraordinary changes are underway in today's American healthcare system. Treatments once considered "fringe"—acupuncture, hypnosis, meditation, imaging and other stress reduction techniques—are increasingly being used alongside conventional western medicine in mainstream hospitals and clinics across the country. This new approach to medicine looks beyond the health of the body or mere absence of disease. It focuses on all aspects of a person's health—mind, body, and spirit—and is referred to as "integrative medicine," or IM.

IM reaffirms the importance of an open relationship between practitioner and patient. Those who practice IM consider a patient's overall satisfaction with life, pointing to irrefutable proof that stress management and good mental hygiene positively affect healing and health. IM utilizes all appropriate, evidence-based therapies to achieve health. However, it doesn't focus solely on curing disease and illness; IM also emphasizes preventing disease and/or living well with chronic disease.

Many patients are seeking IM, adding new practices and therapies to their health routines while maintaining their relationship with a trusted, conventional physician. As the trend toward integrative medicine continues, it is helpful to become familiar with some terms and treatments that are becoming more commonplace.

Note: These treatments have not necessarily been proven effective, and they may not be right for your situation or condition. Always consult your physician before beginning a new therapy.

Acupuncture is based on Chinese traditional medicine. It is the strategic insertion of fine needles into points on the body's surface for the purpose of stimulating healing. This practice is believed to promote the healthy flow of "Qi," or life force, through the body.

Acupressure/Shiatsu is based on Chinese traditional medicine. It involves using pressure to release tension and increase circulation, strengthen weaknesses, and relieve or prevent certain ailments. This practice is believed to promote the healthy flow of "Qi," or life force, through the body.

Alexander Technique® consciously changes body posture to improve physical performance, prevent injury, promote ease and freedom of movement, and lessen stress on the body. It was developed by F.M. Alexander in the 1890's to alleviate throat and vocal cord distress.

Allopathic medicine employs a method of treating disease with remedies that produce effects different from those caused by the disease itself. This term generally refers to the conventional western medical model, which relies heavily on the use of pharmaceuticals.

Aromatherapy uses concentrated essential oils of various plants for therapeutic purposes, particularly for the relief of pain, stress, nausea, and anxiety. Oils may be administered through massage, inhalation, compresses, and baths.

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Art Therapy involves the creation of art in order to increase awareness of self and others. This in turn may promote personal development, increase coping skills, and enhance cognitive function. It is based on personality theories, human development, psychology, family systems, and art education. Art therapists are trained in both art and psychological therapy.

Biofeedback is based on psycho physiological (mind-body) laboratory research and trains patients to observe shifts in their bodily functions (i.e., heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, muscular tension, and brain activity) by using electronic monitors. With this focus, patients learn to adapt and modify their mental and emotional responses to alleviate symptoms and regulate specific conditions.

Chiropractic seeks to restore normal function of the nervous system, usually through manipulation of the spinal column and other body structures.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that emphasizes the substitution of desirable thinking patterns for maladaptive ones.

Dance Therapy asserts that the state of the body has a positive or negative effect on our feelings. It seeks to help the patient uncover and express illness, injury, or emotional and physical trauma through movement, with a goal of integrating, confronting, and accepting these issues.

Exercise includes any physical activity that promotes muscle tone and/or cardiovascular fitness. Physical activity has long been recognized as beneficial, but only in the 1970's did scientific evidence emerge to support these beliefs.

Feldenkrais Method® was developed by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, an Israeli physicist and athlete, and employs exercises intended to increase the body's range of movement, reduce stress, improve posture and flexibility, and allow functioning with greater comfort.

Herbal Medicine (botanical medicine or phytotherapy) focuses on using plant-based materials to treat specific symptoms or diseases. It is based on centuries of formulations from many different cultures and traditions.

Homeopathy advocates that "like cures like," meaning that small, highly-diluted quantities of medicinal substances are given to cure symptoms, even though the same substances given at higher or more concentrated doses would actually cause those symptoms.

Hypnosis teaches patients to use a deep relaxation state to help with smoking cessation, weight loss, pain relief, or self-improvement.

Imagery relies upon the patient's imagination to enhance or promote healing. The patient, often guided by a practitioner or tapes, involves all of the senses (imagining sights, sounds, tastes, smell, and kinesthetic bodily sensations) to achieve specific health and life goals.

Massage Therapy uses touch and tissue manipulation. There are many different forms, including relaxation massage, sports massage, remedial massage, Shiatsu, and reflexology.

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Meditation/Relaxation can be traced back 3,000 years to Indian yogic practices and is also found in Christian literature and Jewish mystical traditions. It invokes a self-induced, qualitative shift in the state of one's consciousness, with related changes in cognition and feelings that contribute to an enhanced sense of physical and emotional well-being.

Music Therapy uses music to both improve general well-being and to meet the needs of those experiencing stress, pain, communication difficulties, emotional trauma, memory loss, and physical rehabilitation.

Naturopathic Medicine is a system of medicine that believes in the body's natural healing forces. Naturopaths maximize those forces using dietary modifications, massage, exercise, acupuncture, homeopathy, minor surgery, and other interventions.

Nutritional Therapy focuses on eating or eliminating particular foods, vitamins, and nutrients for therapeutic benefit. Although food has always played an important role in different medical traditions, modern nutrition is based on early 1900's research that discovered dietary essentials (vitamins) beyond carbohydrates, protein, fat, and minerals.

Osteopathy is a system of medicine based on the theory that disturbances in the musculoskeletal system affect other bodily parts, causing many disorders that can be corrected by body manipulation. Osteopaths also employ conventional medical, surgical, pharmacological, and therapeutic procedures.

Pharmacotherapy (Pharmaceutical) treats disease primarily through the use of drugs.

Psychiatry is a branch of medicine that deals with the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental and emotional disorders.

Prayer is an act of communion with God, another being or object of worship, and is practiced by a wide variety of religions to promote spiritual, mental, and physical wellness.

Qigong is a Chinese practice using movement, affirmations, breath work, visualizations and meditation, to improve the flow of "Qi" or life force, restore internal harmony, and restore the practitioner's harmony with nature.

Reiki is a form of laying-on-of-hands based on the theory that universal life force ("ki" in Japanese) energy can be channeled for healing. It is based on Eastern healing philosophies that assert the existence of an unseen internal life force that maintains mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

Rolfing® is a system of connective tissue manipulation based on the theory that rebalancing and realigning the body with the Earth's gravitational force results in more energy, increased breathing capacity, and alleviation of chronic pain.

Tai Chi is a Chinese system of physical exercises that is believed to facilitate the flow of Qi (life force) in the body, promoting good health and vitality. Tai Chi utilizes movements that are Yin Yang opposites: softness and strength, forward and backward, action and calm.

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TENS is an acronym for Transcutaneous Electric Nerve Stimulation, which applies a low voltage electric current to a localized area. This electric current stimulates the nerves in the area, promoting healing and pain management for certain conditions.

Therapeutic Touch is based on the theory that a practitioner can facilitate energy exchange by using his/her hands as a focus for relaxation, which in turn promotes health and healing.

Trager Approach® focuses on movement re-education, or encouraging the mind to recognize new sensations through the tissues. Practitioners believe that this awareness of movement and lessons in deep relaxation promote wellness.

Yoga is a physical practice of stretching the body in different ways, focusing one's attention, and becoming one with the universe. It uses body, breath, and senses to reconnect the practitioner with the universe and move emotions and thoughts into stillness.

For more information on many of these treatments, visit the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (www.nccam.nih.gov/) and the Cochrane Collaboration Complementary Medicine Field (www.compmed.umm.edu/Cochrane/index.html). Both are good sources of high-quality information when researching the safety and effectiveness of a particular treatment.

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