

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

CAM refers to forms of health care that are used in addition (**complementary**) or instead of (**alternative**) traditional medical treatment. Complementary therapies are often based on traditional knowledge. The scientific evidence suggests that some complementary health approaches may help people manage chronic pain. In most instances, the amount of evidence is too small to clearly show whether a particular therapy is effective for everyone. There is less scientific evidence available about their safety and effectiveness, than for conventional treatments for pain management. Many of the complementary approaches studied for chronic pain have good safety records, but that doesn't mean that they are risk free for everyone.

Many things need to be considered prior to using any CAM therapy such as a person's age, current health status, presence of other medical conditions or pregnancy. Another major consideration is taking prescribed or over the counter medications, as these may affect the safety of some complementary approaches. If you are considering or using a complementary approach for pain, you need to check with your health care provider to make sure that it is safe for you and is compatible with your conventional medical treatments. Some herbs and conventional treatments can interact with other medications and stop them from working properly. They can also cause side effects.

Regulation of complementary therapists

In Australia some complementary therapists are regulated by national legislation.

Chinese medicine practitioners, acupuncturists, Chinese herbal medicine dispensers These practitioners are members of the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia, part of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) governed by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009 which also regulates 10 National Health Practitioner Boards. This means that practitioners must be adequately qualified to practice.

Naturopaths and herbalists

These practitioners are covered by the Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists. This self-governing body maintains a register that makes choosing a naturopath or a Western herbalist safer.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing's Therapeutic Goods Administration is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods sold in Australia. These include medicines, herbal and nutritional supplements, flower remedies and homoeopathic medicines. Approved herbal and nutritional products have an Aust L code, which means they are considered low risk. The products are assessed for safety, but not how well they work.

CAM Therapies

Mind-Body Techniques

(Also known as Psychological techniques, Emotional Therapies or Spiritual Healing)

Support Groups:

These are organised groups where people with chronic pain and their families can meet other people going through similar experiences. Groups can offer practical and emotional support for people in pain or the people who help care for them. They can be in various forms:

- Face-to-face support groups
- Online discussion forums
- Telephone support groups
- Peer support programs

Counselling:

This allows the person in pain an opportunity to discuss various issues with a counsellor or psychologist. They can help them identify problems and explore ways of resolving negative thoughts and feelings that may impact on that person's pain experience and life. It allows an opportunity for the individual to express their emotions in a safe, objective environment, helping to improve self-esteem, communication, relationships and specific difficulties.

Hypnosis:

Deep relaxation is used to help people become more aware of their inner thoughts. It focuses on inducing a psychological state of awareness, where distraction is minimised and focus and concentration is heightened. Hypnosis can help overcome mental blocks that have previously stopped individuals from dealing with their anxieties, fears, low self-esteem, pain, insomnia or other unwanted habits.

Art Therapy:

This allows a way of using visual art to express a person's feelings. An art therapist can help a person in pain explore the images that they have created and understand some of their emotions and concerns.

Music Therapy:

This therapy allows people in pain to people express themselves and feel more in control. It aids relaxation, reduces stress and anxiety, focuses on healing and enjoying the moment.

Life Coaching:

This is about helping people to develop their personal, spiritual, physical and professional lives. Its approach encourages people to live and enjoy their life to the fullest and is focused on finding solutions to problems and getting results by making positive changes for their future despite obstacles.

Relaxation and Meditation:

Relaxation usually includes slow breathing and muscle-loosening exercises to physically and mentally relax the body.

Meditation is an ancient practice that involves holding your attention on a subject such as breathing. There are many different types of meditation. *Mindfulness meditation* means being aware and present in each moment. *Guided imagery*, or *visualisation*, uses your imagination to create healing thoughts. Relaxation and meditation may help to release muscle tension, reduce stress, anxiety and pain.

Spirituality:

Spirituality can mean different things to different people. Some people may consider spirituality as being part of a religious order eg Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism. For others, spirituality may reflect their own individual beliefs about the universe and their place in it, or a search for meaning and purpose to their lives. When people have pain they may find comfort in prayer, meditation or quiet contemplation to help them to deal with it.

Body-Based Practices

(These can be Passive or Active Based Therapies)

Massage Therapy:

There are many styles of massage, but they all aim to promote deep relaxation in tissue by manually applying pressure, tension, vibration and the like to connective tissue and muscle, as a means of assisting relaxation, healing, and well-being. Massage may help reduce low back pain, anxiety and stress, nausea and muscle tension.

Reflexology:

This is a form of foot and hand massage. Reflexologists believe that certain points on the feet and hands correspond to the body's internal organs and systems, like a map. Many people find reflexology very relaxing. By pressing on reflex points, energy meridians are unblocked and healthy changes can occur in the corresponding parts of the body.

Aromatherapy:

This is the use of aromatic essential oils extracted from plants for healing and relaxation. They are mainly used mainly during massage but can also be used in baths, inhalations or vaporisers or specialised aromatherapy oil burners. When these essential oils are inhaled or absorbed through the skin, the oil stimulates positive effects on different systems in the body. Aromatherapy can aid relaxation and reduce stress.

Osteopathy:

An osteopath focuses on the links between the structure and function of the body and uses manual techniques to assist the body to heal itself. The Australian Osteopathic Association regulates practice. AOA osteopaths are government registered, meet high professional standards and complete annual continuing professional education to practice

Chiropractic Medicine:

This involves spinal manipulation performed by trained practitioners that involves using their hands or a device to apply a controlled force to a joint of the spine. The focus is on the structure and function of the spine and its relationship to the nervous and musculoskeletal systems and general well-being.

Acupuncture:

Acupuncturists put fine, sterile needles just under the skin into points or apply a laser probe on acupuncture points along the meridian channels in the body. It is an important part of traditional Chinese Medicine and is based on the theory that this unblocks and moves qi (energy) to strengthen vital force and reduce physical and emotional symptoms.

Western Chinese or *Medical Acupuncture* is an interpretation of the traditional Chinese acupuncture. It works on the theory that the needles stimulate nerves to release the body's own natural chemicals, which help reduce pain or regulate the brain and their functions.

Energy Therapies:

They work on the concept that everyone has an energy field and unblocking it restores balance. Techniques include:

- Bowen therapy
- Polarity therapy
- Reiki
- Healing touch
- Therapeutic touch.

Energy therapies focus on the transference of energy to promote equilibrium and are gentle. The aim is to increase energy levels, promote relaxation, self-healing and wellbeing.

Yoga and Physical Activity:

Yoga is a mind and body practice that combines physical activity or postures, slow and deepening breathing exercises, and meditation. There are many styles of yoga with varying intensity from gentle, such as *hatha yoga* to vigorous, such as *ashtanga yoga/Iyengar*. Yoga helps both physical and emotional health and has been studied for pain conditions such as chronic low-back pain and arthritis.

Tai chi:

This is a part of traditional Chinese medicine that combines movement, breath work and meditation. Movements create stability in the body, reflecting an ancient Chinese concept of balance known as 'ying and yang' Breath work is calming and meditative, while creating

and holding the poses helps loosen and strengthen the muscles and can help relieve pain and reduces stress.

Qi gong:

This is part of traditional Chinese medicine. 'Qi' means one's life energy, and 'gong' means work. It combines movement with controlled breathing and meditation. Movements keep the flow of energy running through the body's energy channels. This can help generate a sense of wellbeing and peace for the individual, as well as improving both mental and physical vitality.

Other Active Exercise Techniques:

There are other exercise techniques you might like to explore. They are generally accepted as being beneficial for improving breathing, strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing.

Alexander technique: This is not a type of exercise, but an approach to balance and wellbeing in mind and body and teaches people to be aware of the way they move and hold themselves. By changing the way people use their body, they can enhance their mental and physical functioning on many levels.

Feldenkrais: This method helps people become more aware of the way they move and how this contributes to or compensates for bad posture, pain and mobility restrictions. By gently retraining the mind and body to be open to new possibilities in movement, people find ways to become freer and more comfortable.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d03E3XQeF0U>

Pilates: A program that encourages the mind to be aware of its control over one's muscles. Using awareness of one's breath and posture, the method helps to strengthen core muscles and correct postural habits that have contributed to pain, reduced mobility and poor coordination.

Strength training or lifting weights (resistance training): This active exercise technique is good to help people improve muscle strength, flexibility, mobility, fitness and general wellbeing.

Therapies Using Herbs

Herbal medicines use various parts of the plant that cause chemical changes in the body when consumed or applied to the skin to treat disease and promote health.

Western Herbal Medicine:

Western herbal medicines are usually made from herbs grown in Europe and North America, but some come from Asia. Herbs are used to help the body work more efficiently, assisting healing and well-being, overcome symptoms and improve vitality.

Chinese Herbal Medicine:

Chinese herbs are a key part of traditional Chinese medicine. Herbs are used to unblock energy meridians, bring harmony between yin and yang, and restore organ function and promote well-being and general health.

Therapies Based on Diet**Naturopathic Nutrition:**

Naturopathic nutrition is about what you eat and how it affects your health and wellbeing. Naturopathy maintains that the mind, body and spirit are all connected, and that the body can heal itself through dietary and lifestyle changes. It promotes the use of whole foods, organic foods and certain food types for different people. For your body to function efficiently, you need to eat a balanced diet of fats, proteins and carbohydrates. You also need vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other nutrients found in fresh food. It finds and treats both the cause and effect of symptoms using a combination of dietary changes, bodywork and herbal medicines or nutritional supplements.

Other Therapies**Homeopathy:**

This is based on the theory of 'like cures like'. It tries to stimulate the body's ability to heal itself by giving small doses of highly diluted substances. For example you would be given a substance that causes similar symptoms in a healthy body as the symptoms you are experiencing. This is said to stimulate energy in the body that relieves the symptoms of ill health. Homoeopathic remedies are made from plant, mineral and animal substances. Homoeopathy is a gentle way to restore vitality and reduce emotional imbalances in the body.

Flower Remedies:

Also known as flower essences, these are highly diluted extracts from the flowers of wild plants. There are many types of flower remedies from around the world. They are used to balance the mind, body and spirit so you are more able to cope with emotional problems, which sometimes can contribute to poor health.

References:

National Centre for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM): US Department of health and Human Service. (Sourced 2/3/2014) <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm>

Understanding Complementary Therapies A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends. The Cancer Council, NSW. June 2012 (Sourced 2/3/2014) http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/types-treatments-trials/about_alternative_treatments/help_and_support.html

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Things to consider before using complementary therapies

What are the benefits?

What's the scientific evidence to support its use?

Can I afford the cost of the therapies or medicines?

Will the therapy directly harm me because of:

- Possible side effects
- Possible interaction with other conventional treatment or medications

General questions to ask any potential complementary therapist

1. What are your qualifications? Are you a member of a professional association?
2. What training or experience do you have in treating people with chronic pain?
3. What exactly is the therapy and how does it work?
4. How long will it take to work?
5. How can the therapies you practise help me?
6. Are there any specific precautions you would take for me?
7. Can these therapies be combined with conventional treatment?
8. Do you expect me to stop using any of my usual medication?
9. Are you willing to work with other health professionals I may need to see?
10. How long should I use this therapy and how will I know if it's working?
11. What do you charge for a consultation?
12. What can I expect from a consultation?
13. How many consultations do you recommend, and how often?
14. How much can I expect to pay for medicines?
15. Have the products or medicines you dispense been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration?

General questions to ask your doctor

1. Are you familiar with complementary therapies or medicines for chronic pain?
2. Are there any complementary therapies you think might help me?
3. Would you be happy for me to use complementary therapies?
4. Would you be willing to guide me in my research or choice of complementary therapies for chronic pain?
5. Would you be willing to talk to my complementary therapists if necessary?

6. Can you recommend any complementary therapists for my chronic pain?
7. Do you know whether the complementary medicines I'm taking or wish to take will interfere with any of my treatments?

Professional Associations

The following associations represent practitioners across a range of complementary therapies in Australia. Click on the link to go to their website and find out more about the different therapies and to locate a registered practitioner.

Professional Associations	
Association of Massage Therapists	
Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association	
Australian Chiropractor Association	
Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association	
Australian Association of Massage Therapists	
Australian Feldenkrais Guild	
Australian Homoeopathic Association	
Australian Hypnotherapists' Association	
Australian Music Therapy Association	
Australian Natural Therapists Association	
Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association	
Australian Osteopaths Association	
Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique	
Australian Traditional Medicine Society	
Bowen Therapists Federation of Australia	
Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia	
Dietitians Association of Australia	
International Aromatherapy and Aromatic Medicine Association	
Exercise and Sports Science Australia	
National Herbalists Association of Australia	

[Reflexology Association of Australia](#)

[Reiki Australia](#)

[Shiatsu Therapy Association of Australia](#)

[Yoga Australia](#)

Australian Organisations

Australasian Integrative Medicine Association

www.aima.net.au

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

www.ahpra.gov.au

Health Insite – an Australian Government Initiative

[www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/complementary and alternative therapies](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/complementary_and_alternative_therapies)

The National Institute of Complementary Medicine

www.nicm.edu.au

Therapeutic Goods Administration

www.tga.gov.au

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

www.nccam.nih.gov

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database

www.naturaldatabase.com

Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine

www.cancer.gov/cam