



The Skeptic's Guide to The Adventures of Life

More Than One-Third of U.S. Adults Use Complementary and Alternative Medicine, According to Government Survey

According to a nationwide government survey, 36 percent of U.S. adults aged 18 years and over use some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). The survey was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2002 and the results were released May 27, 2004.

CAM is defined as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. Other terms for conventional medicine include allopathy; Western, mainstream, orthodox, and regular medicine; and biomedicine. Some conventional medical practitioners are also practitioners of CAM.

CAM Practices

Biologically based practices use substances found in nature, such as herbs, special diets, or vitamins (in doses outside those used in conventional medicine).

Energy medicine involves the use of energy fields, such as magnetic fields or biofields (energy fields that some believe surround and penetrate the human body).

Manipulative and body-based practices are based on manipulation or movement of one or more body parts.

Mind-body medicine uses a variety of techniques designed to enhance the mind's ability to affect bodily function and symptoms.

Whole medical systems are built upon complete systems of theory and practice. Often, these systems have evolved apart from and earlier than the conventional medical approach used in the United States.

The survey, administered to over 31,000 representative U.S. adults, was conducted as part of the CDC's 2002 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). Developed by National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) and the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the survey included questions on 27 types of CAM therapies commonly used in the United States. These included 10 types of provider-based therapies, such as acupuncture and chiropractic, and 17 other therapies that do not require a provider, such as natural products (herbs or botanical products), special diets, and megavitamin therapy.

CAM Therapies Included in the 2002 NHIS

Acupuncture*(4%)

Ayurveda* (<1%)
 Biofeedback* (1%)
 Chelation therapy* (<1%)
 Chiropractic care *(20%)
 Deep breathing exercises (15%)

Diet-based therapies (7%)

Energy healing therapy/Reiki*(1%)

Folk medicine* (1%)

Guided imagery (3%)

Homeopathic treatment (4%)

Hypnosis* (2%)

Massage* (9%)

Meditation (10%)

Megavitamin therapy (4%)

Natural Products **(25%)**

Naturopathy*(1%)

Prayer for health reasons (55%)

Progressive relaxation (4%)

Qi gong (1%)

Tai chi (3 %)

Yoga (8%)

* indicates a practitioner-based therapy.

(%) indicates percentage of survey participants who had used the therapy.

Bold indicates therapies experienced and chronicled in *The Skeptic's Guide to The Adventures of Life*.

Overall, the survey revealed that CAM use was greater among a variety of population groups, including women; people with higher education; those who had been hospitalized within the past year; and former smokers, compared to current smokers or those who had never smoked.

Used CAM in last 12 months, by selected characteristics:

United States 2002 (excludes megavitamin therapy and prayer)

Sex

Male	30%
Female	40%

Age

18-29	33%
30-39	38%
40-49	39%
50-59	40%
60-69	33%
70-84	25%
85 and older	15%

Race

White	36%
Black or African American	26%
Asian	43%
Hispanic or Latino	28

Education

Less than high school	21%
High School graduate/GED recipient	30%
Some college-no degree	39%
Associate of arts degree	40%
Bachelor of arts or science degree	46%
Masters, doctorate, professional degree	49%

Family Income

Less than \$20,000	30%
\$20,000-\$34,999	34%
\$35,000-\$54,999	37%
\$55,000-\$74,999	37%
\$75,000 or more	43%

Region

Northeast	36%
Midwest	37%
South	30%
West	42%

According to the survey, Americans are most likely to use CAM for back, neck, head, or joint aches, or other painful conditions; colds; anxiety or depression; gastrointestinal disorders; or sleeping problems. It appears that CAM is most often used to treat and/or prevent musculoskeletal conditions or other conditions involving chronic or recurring pain.

Use CAM in last 12 months by Disease or Condition For Which It Was Used

Back pain or problem (17%)
Head or chest cold (10%)
Neck pain or problem (7%)
Joint pain or stiffness (5%)
Anxiety/depression (5%)
Arthritis, gout, lupus, or fibromyalgia (5%)
Stomach or intestinal illness (4%)
Severe headache or migraine (3%)
Recurring pain (2%)
Insomnia or trouble sleeping (2%)
Sinusitis (1%)
Cholesterol (1%)
Asthma (1%)
Hypertension (1%)
Menopause (1%)

(%) indicates percentage of survey participants who had used CAM therapy to treat disease or condition.

The survey found that most people use CAM along with conventional medicine rather than in place of conventional medicine.

In addition to gathering data on the use of CAM practices, the survey also sought information about why people use CAM. Key findings indicate that:

- 55 percent of adults said they were most likely to use CAM because they believed that it would help them when combined with conventional medical treatments
- 50 percent thought CAM would be interesting to try
- 26 percent used CAM because a conventional medical professional suggested they try it
- 13 percent used CAM because they felt that conventional medicine was too expensive

NCCAM, a component of the National Institutes of Health, DHHS, is dedicated to exploring complementary and alternative healing practices in the context of rigorous science, training CAM researchers, and disseminating authoritative information to the public and professionals. For additional information, call NCCAM's Clearinghouse toll free at 1-888-644-6226 or visit NCCAM's Web site at nccam.nih.gov.