

## A LOOK AT ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

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The effectiveness of any kind of therapy depends upon a host of factors, including the type of disease and its severity and the patient's general state of health. In order to combat sickness, many doctors rely heavily on prescribing medicines that are developed by pharmaceutical companies.

Alternative medicine differs from conventional therapies in its approach to health. Practitioners of alternative therapies generally look at the whole person rather than at just a troubled organ or a disease state. Alternative methods usually work more slowly, gentler and less hazardous than orthodox methods. But there are cases when a disease may develop to the point where strong drugs- perhaps even surgery-are necessary to save life. Therefore, many doctors are now recognizing value of both orthodox and alternative therapies. A few examples of alternative therapies are presented.

*Naturopathy* is a system of treatment that emphasizes the use of natural agents or physical means to condition the body and allow it to heal itself.

*Hydrotherapy* uses water in various ways to treat ailments, and now various forms of such treatment are also recognized by modern medicine.

*Herbal remedies* are perhaps the most common form of alternative medicine. But only a relatively small number of plant species have been studied. A number of scientific studies show the usefulness of certain herbs in treating mild depression, age-related memory loss, and symptoms of benign prostate enlargement. There is the perception that these remedies are safer than synthetic drugs and have no side effects. But people with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, or those taking other medications should be careful about taking herbal remedies.

*Chiropractic* is among the most commonly used alternative treatments. Healing can be promoted when spinal misalignments are corrected. That is why chiropractors specialize in spinal manipulation to adjust the vertebrae of their patients. Significantly, there is a low incidence of side effect.

*Dietary supplements*, such as vitamins and minerals, have reportedly been helpful in preventing and treating a number of health problems, including anemia and osteoporosis-and even in preventing some birth defects. Government recommended daily doses of vitamins are relatively safe and useful. On the other hand, megadoses promoted for treatment of some illnesses may be hazardous to health. In life-threatening emergencies, however, it may be wiser to use more conventional medical treatments.

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