

Integrative Medicine in Traumatic Brain Injury



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KEYWORDS

• Integrative medicine • Traumatic brain injury • Complementary and integrative health

KEY POINTS

- Integrative medicine combines complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices in which there is some high-quality evidence of safety and effectiveness in addition to conventional medicine for patient care.
- The scope of CAM includes mind-body practices, manipulative therapies, traditional Chinese medicine, and natural products among others.
- There is growing evidence to support CAM techniques in the treatment of common comorbidities, recovery, and symptom management in the traumatic brain injury population.
- Acupuncture, tai chi, qigong, yoga, and mindfulness are all CAM techniques that have been researched in treatment of patients with a traumatic brain injury.
- Nutraceutical use in the treatment of traumatic brain injury is based on physiologic properties of specific substances but has yet to be proven in high-quality clinical trials.

INTRODUCTION

Integrative Medicine

Complementary and Integrative medicine (CIM) is a holistic, interdisciplinary approach, designed to treat the person, not just the disease. It is a partnership between the patient and his or her providers, where the goal is to treat the mind, body, and spirit, all at the same time. CIM combines treatments of conventional medicine and elements of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) where there is strong evidence of safety and effectiveness.

The Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, says on its Web site: "Our Center strives to successfully integrate modern medicine,

Disclosure Statement: The authors have nothing to disclose.

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Phys Med Rehabil Clin N Am 28 (2017) 363–378

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pmr.2016.12.011>

1047-9651/17/Published by Elsevier Inc.

pmr.theclinics.com

healthy lifestyle practices, and established healing approaches from around the globe, in an effort to meet the need for a new model of care and daily living that promotes healing and well-being of the whole person—mind, body and spirit.”¹ CIM encompasses east and west, mind and body, individual and family. Most importantly, CIM is patient centered. It transforms the current medical model to a personalized, proactive, patient-driven approach that enables engagement with life in accordance with how an individual wants to live. CIM focuses on empowering the consumer through comprehensive education regarding their health and wellness, thereby encouraging active participation in one’s own well-being.

Complementary and Integrative Health

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health uses the term “complementary health approaches” and defines 2 specific subgroups: natural products and mind-body practices; and offers a third: other complementary health approaches.

Natural products are herbs and supplements, such as probiotics, and vitamins and minerals. Mind-body practices include a very diverse large group of techniques or procedures that include acupuncture, massage, meditation, mindfulness, movement therapies, relaxation techniques, spinal manipulation, traditional Chinese medicine (to include tai chi and qigong), yoga, and others not specifically listed. Ayurvedic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, and naturopathy are examples of approaches that fall into the other complementary health subgroup.²

Complementary medicine involves the use of non-mainstream techniques or treatments in conjunction with conventional medicine. Alternative medicine, on the other hand, is the use of CAM in place of conventional medicine.

Although limited specific research has been directed toward the use of integrative medicine for individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI), the overall principles and specific techniques are appropriate for TBI rehabilitation and should be applied based on the individual’s specific needs and progress.

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture is a form of energy medicine and is one of the more common and more researched of the CAM modalities; however, it shares with the others a similar treatment setting. Acupuncture also shares a conceptual framework similar to tai chi or qigong, in that life energy, called Qi (pronounced chee), is thought to be circulating through all parts of the body via energy channels, called meridians. These meridians connect the exterior to the interior, the organs to each other and the exterior.

The classical Chinese explanation is that channels of energy run in regular patterns through the body and over its surface in channels, called meridians. Much like blood flow may cause infarction, an obstruction in the movement of these energy rivers will cause the flow of Qi to become blocked or unbalanced, thus causing abnormality. Acupuncture is one of the treatments used to re-establish the flow of Qi by placing needles at points along the meridians, thus allowing the body to return to a homeostasis, easing the ailment for which it was prescribed.

The modern scientific explanation is that needling the acupuncture points stimulates the nervous system to release chemicals in the muscles, spinal cord, and brain. These chemicals will either change the experience of pain or they will trigger the release of other chemicals and hormones that influence the body’s own internal regulating system.

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