

Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Inflammatory Bowel Disease Around the World



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KEYWORDS

- Complementary and alternative medicine • Traditional medicine
- Inflammatory bowel disease

KEY POINTS

- Worldwide, the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is common in the general population and is especially used by patients with chronic diseases or conditions, including ulcerative colitis and Crohns disease.
- Patients with IBD are frequently using or have used a wide variety of CAM practices and products to treat their disease, ameliorate their symptoms, or just to feel better.
- This is a global phenomenon with geographic and local diversity of the CAM practices and products influenced by cultural factors.
- The main reasons for CAM use include conventional treatment failure or side effects and patients' wish to gain greater control over their disease with more "natural" and "safer" products or practices.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is common in the general population and is especially used by patients with chronic diseases or conditions, including ulcerative colitis and Crohn disease. Because many patients are showing increasing interest in CAM use and seeking information and advice from their health practitioners, it is important that gastroenterologists and other physicians who are involved in the care of patients with inflammatory bowel diseases (IBDs) become

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more familiar with CAM therapies, including the spectrum of CAM practices and products, the potential for combination with conventional therapies, and finally, the risks and benefits of CAM use.¹⁻³

In this article, the authors provide details for CAM use among patients with IBD around the world over the last decade, focusing on the geographic variations regarding the prevalence of CAM use, the common CAM practices and products used, the reasons for CAM use, and the factors associated with their use. Details of individual CAM therapies used in IBD are covered in other reviews included in this issue.

TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

There is heterogeneity in CAM terminology because of different traditions and cultures across the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) provides the definitions for traditional medicine (TM) and CAM.⁴ TM is the total of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement, or treatment of physical and mental illness. CAM refers to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country's own tradition or conventional medicine and are not fully integrated into the dominant health care system. They are used interchangeably with TM in some countries. The use of TM remains widespread in developing countries, whereas the use of CAM is increasing in developed countries.⁴ The term complementary medicine (CM) implies that CAM is used in combination with conventional medicine, whereas in alternative medicine, CAM is used in place of conventional medicine.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), which is part of the National Institutes for Health in the United States, characterizes the term integrative medicine as the incorporation of complementary approaches into mainstream health care in an evidence-based and coordinated way.⁵ The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014 to 2023 includes the integration, where feasible, of TM/CM within national health care systems.⁴

The NCCAM groups CAM into 5 broad categories (**Table 1**): (1) Whole medical systems: theories and practices such as homeopathic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, and traditional Indian Ayurveda medicine; (2) Mind-body interventions: strengthen communication between the mind and body; (3) Biologically based therapies; (4) Manipulative and body-based methods; (5) Energy therapies: use of energy fields in the body to promote health and healing, for example, qi gong, tai chi, and magnet therapy.

Whole medical systems	Homeopathic medicine, naturopathic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine/acupuncture, Ayurveda
Mind-body medicine	Meditation, prayer, mental healing, yoga, relaxation techniques, hypnotherapy
Biologically based therapies	Herbal products, dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals), probiotics
Manipulative and body-based practices	Chiropractic, osteopathy, massage
Energy medicine	Qi gong, tai chi, magnet therapy, movement therapies

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