



# Application of Alternative Medicine in Dentistry: An Overview



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## Abstract

Alternative medicine treatments include various types of natural and spiritual healing methods. Treatments can be practiced individually as well as in condition with other conventional treatment for the purpose of relaxing mind, body and soul. Alternative medicines are into practice since ancient time and are practiced even today worldwide. Every country has its own conventional system of health. Alternative medicines are nowadays incorporated in many fields including dentistry. A result from few studies conducted has shown significant effect of holistic healing on dental and oral health. This article reviews about impact of alternative medicine in treating dental health and problems associated with it.

**Keywords:** Dentistry; Yoga; Alternative medicine; Periodontal health; Alternative dentistry

## Introduction

In General Guidelines for Methodologies on Research and Evaluation of Traditional Medicine, published in 2000 by the World Health Organization (WHO): Complementary And Alternative Medicine were defined as a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country's own tradition and are not integrated into the dominant health care system.

The US National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), states that Complimentary & Alternative medicine (CAM) is "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine".

Quite often we come across patients who express their interest in mind body complimentary therapies to treat their health conditions. Alternative medicine also called as complimentary or integrative medicine, usually discuss and advise patients to any available alternate therapies. As the name suggest "alternative", means that its basic lies in a non-drug approach [1].

Alternative medicine consists of wide variety of practices, products and therapies. In 1993 Britain's Prince Charles has established the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, claiming that this alternative medicine was an effective alternative approach to biomedicine. In 2001 MEDLINE also introduced a MeSH term

for scientific publication in alternative medicine. Through 2004, continued to be a regular part of the health care system, including homeopathy. It was also reported that by 2013 50% of Americans were using Complimentary and Alternative Medicine. Alternative medicine has grown in popularity and is being used by a lot of people in many countries. Regulation and licensing of alternative medicine varies between and within countries [2].

Alternative medicine is often used interchangeably with terms like complementary medicine, integrative medicine, holistic medicine, fringe medicine, unconventional medicine.

## Classification

### Manipulative and body based therapies

- Massage
- Chiropractic
- Osteopathy

### Mind body interventions

- Yoga
- Spirituality
- Relaxation

### Alternative medical systems

- a) Homeopathy
- b) Naturopathy
- c) Ayurveda

### Energy therapies

- a) Reiki
- b) Magnets
- c) Qigong

### Biologically based approaches

- a) Diets
- b) Herbs
- c) Vitamins

### Based on cultural origin or type of belief

1. Unscientific belief systems
2. Traditional ethnic systems
3. Supernatural energies
4. Holistic therapy
5. Religion, faith healing, and prayer

#### Unscientific belief system

**Naturopathy:** It is based on a belief that the body heals itself using a supernatural vital energy that guides bodily processes.

**Homeopathy:** Believes that a substance that causes the symptoms of a disease in healthy people cures similar symptoms in sick people.

#### Traditional ethnic systems

It is based on traditional medicine practices like traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Ayurveda.

Common practices in TCM include:

- a) Herbal medicine
- b) Accupuncture
- c) Massage
- d) Exercise
- e) Dietary therapy

Traditional medicine of India

#### Ayurveda

- a) It is a 5000 years old system of natural healing having its origin in vedic culture of india.
- b) Ayurveda believes in the existence of three elemental substances, the doshas or constitutions (called Vata, Pitta and

Kapha).

- c) It states that a balance of the doshas results in health, while imbalance results in disease.

- d) Ayurveda stresses the use of plant-based medicines and treatments, with some animal products, and added minerals that includes sulphur, copper, gold, and arsenic.

#### Supernatural energies

It believes in the existence of supernatural energies as in Biofeild therapy, which intends to influence the energy field that surrounds and penetrates the body.

Bioelectromagnetic therapy uses electromagnetic fields like pulsed fields, direct current fields in an unconventional manner with the help of magnets.

**Chiropractic:** Spinal manipulation aims to treat “vertebral subluxations” which are claimed to put pressure on nerves.

**Reiki:** Practitioners place their palms on the patient near Chakras that they believe are centers of supernatural energies in the belief that these energies can transfer from the practitioner’s palms to heal the patient.

#### Holistic therapy

**Mind- Body Medicine:** The mind can affect “bodily functions and symptoms” and there is an interconnection between the mind, body, and spirit.

#### Religion, Faith Healing, & Prayer

- a) Christian faith healing
- b) Shamanism

Such Practices Believes That There Is A Divine Or Spiritual Interventions In Healing. The Practitioner can reach an altered state of consciousness in order to Connect with the Spiritual World To Heal The Patient [3,4].

### Applications in Dentistry

In recent years, many research studies h as been conducted in the field of dentistry related to traditional practices in medicine including holistic and natural therapies, with significant outcome.

#### Alternative Dentistry

Holistic Therapy (Yoga)

Accupuncture

Homeopathy

Herbal Therapy

Traditional Ethnic System

#### Yoga for Dental Care

The practice of yoga in the Indian subcontinent was documented as early as 3000 BC.The word ‘yoga’ is derived from

Sanskrit word yuz, which is often interpreted as meaning 'to unite'. Yoga focuses on body, breathing and mind. This is accomplished by Asanas (exercise postures), pranayama (breathing techniques) and meditation. Yoga prevents the impairment of cellular immunity seen in stress. Yoga involves mind body relaxation techniques and cushions the changes related to stress. Since yoga involves mind body relaxation techniques (pranayama and meditation) along with mild to moderate physical exercise (Asanas), yoga may optimize the production of the pro-inflammatory cytokines [2,5].

### Yoga

- a) Sirhasana helps in stimulates the blood flow to pituitary gland for strengthen the bones and teeth to prevent periodontal problems.
- b) Shitali & Shitkar Pranayama in these teeth is occluded during breathing to intermittent force on teeth and correction of alignment of teeth.
- c) Sarvangasana helps in stimulate the thyroid gland to increase the blood circulation in the mouth for prevention of dental disorders.
- d) Bhujangasana posture is so therapeutic for practicing dental surges, as it tones up the whole spine.

Thus, yoga is helpful in prevention of dental diseases and maintenance of good oral hygiene.

**Accupuncture:** Is many years old Chinese way of treatment in which needles are inserted in specific areas of the body. Several studies have been conducted which shows that acupuncture can help in reducing postoperative pain and anxiety. Other dental conditions in which acupuncture can be of use are Temporomandibular disorders (TMD) and Xerostomia. Also offers alternative treatment options in dentistry. Some of the conditions in which it is found to be effective are Tooth Pain, Gingivitis, Dry Socket, Halitosis, Dental Trauma, Abscess, and Mouth Ulcers Etc.

**Herbal Therapy:** Many plants/ herbs have the ability to provide anti-inflammatory, analgesic effect. E.g. Herbs like Echinacea, Aloe vera, Chamomile, Peppermint, Eucalyptus etc. They can provide relief in pain and canker sores.

**Traditional Ethnic System:** An effective all natural solution for dental health comes in the form of an ancient ayurvedic practice called OIL-PULLING. It may sound strange but it can in fact become a very therapeutic, meditative practice. The idea is that the toxins are drawn out into the oil providing a deep cleaning and general detox. The practice can be performed as the usual oral hygiene routine [1,6].

### Limitations

It is usually based on religion, tradition, belief in supernatural energies, pseudoscience, and errors in reasoning. It typically lacks any scientific validation, and their effectiveness is either unproved or disproved. Treatments are not part of the conventional or science-based healthcare system. Research on alternative medicine is frequently of low quality and methodologically flawed. Might show some side effects when combined with conventional treatments. Treatments are of long duration [5].

### Conclusion

Although there are lot of benefits and significance in healthcare, Alternative Medicine cannot be substituted completely for a conventional scientific procedures and treatments. Nonetheless, it can always be used as an adjunct to conventional medical procedures.

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