



A Different Approach

Alternative medicine could open the door to a more balanced health care program for you and your family

IN THE FAST-PACED LIFE OF the American way, is it any wonder why, when dealing with health problems, we want an immediate answer and a quick fix? When a headache surfaces, the first thing we grab is a bottle of ibuprofen. With rising health care costs and questionable drugs available such as Vioxx, many Americans are searching for other answers. People with chronic pain, serious illness, and even those with a common headache have been researching alternative ways to relieve pain and reduce medical bills. Alternative medicine is defined as “methods and practices used in place of conventional treatments.”

Many people are giving alternative medicine a try for a variety of reasons. A few examples include:

- They are dissatisfied with the effectiveness of conventional medicine.
- They are uncomfortable with taking the drug prescribed.
- The medication prescribed is not covered by insurance and is costly.
- They want more involvement in the medical decision making on their own health.
- A wealth of information about alternative medicines and practices is available on the Internet.

Alternative methods to explore can be as simple as a new relaxation technique to something more involved—like acupuncture. Depending on your health issue, an alternative medicine or practice could help alleviate some of the symptoms you are experiencing. Medicines and treatments that you may have never heard of could be worth looking into.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese practice that involves inserting small needles into various points in the body to stimu-

late nerve impulses. It has been only since the 1970s that western culture has taken an interest in using this alternative treatment. The most common ailments that can be treated by acupuncture are lower backache, headaches, arthritic conditions, allergic reactions, analgesia, and relief of muscle spasms.

Acupuncturists use about six different types of needles that vary in length, width, and shape to insert into the acupuncture points. Doctors believe that acupuncture works because the needles activate the body’s main information carrying systems and send signals to increase blood flow to an area and increase lymphatic drainage.

Chiropractic Care

A more common alternative treatment option is chiropractic care. Chiropractic is a branch of the healing arts that is concerned with human health and disease processes. It is a drug-free, non-surgical science that does not include pharmaceuticals or invasive surgery.

Doctors of chiropractic have a deep respect for the human body’s ability to heal itself without the use of surgery or medication. They consider man as an integrated being and give special attention to the physiological and biochemical aspects of the body. Treatment procedures commonly used include the adjustment and manipulation of the articulations and adjacent tissues of the human body, particularly of the spinal column. Patients include individuals with headaches, joint pain, neck pain, back pain, osteoarthritis, spinal disk conditions, carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, sprains, and strains.

Herbal Medicine

The use of herbal medicine is one of the biggest areas of research in alternative

medicine today and also the most controversial. Herbal medicine is a system of medicine that uses various remedies derived from plants and plant extracts to treat disorders and maintain good health.

Just because herbs are considered “natural” doesn’t mean they are always safe. If you are interested in trying herbal medicine, find a health care professional you trust to guide you and give you suggestions on the best herbs to take. It is recommended that you only purchase herbal medicine from reputable businesses that specialize in herbs.

Some common herbs and the ailments treated include:

- Devils Claw—lower back pain
- Echinacea—upper respiratory infections
- Evening Primrose—rheumatoid arthritis, premenstrual syndrome
- Feverfew—migraine headaches
- Garlic—lowering blood pressure

Dealing with pain day in and day out can drag down your emotional well-being. One of the biggest reasons for success in coping with pain is believing that the treatment option you are using is working. It’s mind over matter. Some simple solutions to pain can be changing your diet to add more fruits, vegetables, water, and green tea; exercising more; or using meditation and relaxation techniques.

Like any type of medication or treatment, alternative medicine may not be right for everyone. Your health is very important, and the type of health care you receive should be chosen with care and precaution. When researching any type of medication, be sure to know the side effects and what the outcome is supposed to be. Before taking any alternative medication, check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure it won’t interact negatively with prescribed medication. ♦