

# Overview of Complementary Health Approaches

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Complementary health approaches, also referred to as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), integrative health therapies, and other terms, refers to a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. Complementary health approaches include therapies or products developed outside of mainstream Western medicine.

## What are complementary health approaches?

“Complementary” generally refers to using a non-mainstream approach together with conventional medicine. “Alternative” refers to using a non-mainstream approach in place of conventional medicine. But this does not mean that these approaches are not legitimate or cannot provide you with real benefits. Increasing number of medical colleges are teaching the clinical practice of complementary medicine. Complementary health approaches for people with facial pain can be used along with conventional health care. Before you begin any approach, the FPA urges you to check with your doctor. The list of complementary health approaches grows year by year as new options are proven safe and (at least to some degree) effective.

## Categories

Most complementary approaches fall into one of two categories:

### Mind and body practice

Mind and body practices include a varied group of techniques administered or taught by a trained practitioner or teacher. Examples

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include acupuncture, massage therapy, meditation, and yoga. Connecting the mind, body, and spirit through these techniques, the idea is that you can improve your health and heal yourself.

**Natural products**

Natural products include herbs, vitamins and minerals, and probiotics. They are often sold as dietary supplements.

**Integrative Health Care**

You may have heard of “integrative” health care and wondered what that term means. Integrative health care emphasizes a holistic, patient-focused approach to health care and wellness—often including mental, emotional, functional, spiritual, social, and community aspects. Integrative health care often brings conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way. With integrative health care, there is a trusting partnership developed between practitioner and patient. Researchers are currently exploring the potential benefits of integrative health in a variety of situations, including pain management.

**The facts about complementary health approaches**

Researchers are learning more about these therapies as studies are conducted to determine if they have scientific merit. Some approaches have been studied more than others, and some show scientific evidence that they ‘work’. Others have not been backed up by science; however, they may still be helpful to you. Remember, how you feel plays a role in how you cope.

**Complementary health approaches may help you to:**

1. Cope with your facial pain and a diagnosis of a chronic pain condition
2. Lower your stress and fear which negatively impact your health and worsen your pain
3. Manage anxiety when you have medical or dental appointments or treatments
4. Feel empowered that you are taking active measures to control your body, mind, and overall well-being
5. Reduce your physical pain as an adjunct to your current treatment regimen
6. Possibly lower your medication dosages (but only after you check with your doctor)

**Advantages of using complementary health approaches**

When you take medications or undergo medical procedures, the goal is to have an improvement in pain. With complementary approaches, the goal is to improve your quality of life. Once you have educated yourself and spoken with your doctor to ensure an approach will be safe, these approaches include no man-made or synthetic substances that you would be putting on or in your body. Complementary approaches include low or no negative side effects. You can practice many of these approaches whenever and wherever you choose.

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### **For facial pain, some treatments that may be helpful include:**

Acupuncture, Ayurveda, Cannabis, Deep breathing techniques, Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), Homeopathy, Meditation, Mindfulness, Natural products (herbs, supplements, vitamins and minerals), Special Diets, Upper Cervical Chiropractic Care, Yoga, Tai Chi, Chi Qong.

### **Tools in the toolbox**

Like many people with facial pain, you may find that there is no “magic bullet” to be pain free, but some of these options could contribute to pain relief and well-being overall. If you give an approach a ‘fair shot’ and it does not help, you can move on to the next. Think of complementary health therapies as tools in your facial pain toolbox- options you can use, in the best combination for you.

### **Before trying a new approach**

Let your doctor know which therapy you want to try. When you use complementary treatment, seek out a certified professional, preferably one who treats other patients with facial pain. Do not stop taking your conventional medications without discussing with your doctor. Try these modalities one at a time. If you try too many at once, you will not know which ones work and which ones do not. Explore your options and be open to new ideas. Try yoga, meditation, or exercise (even if it is just walking). Eat as well as you can and keep your body and mind healthy. A strong body and mind are essential for good pain management.

### **The NCCIH**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has established a National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), which provides helpful information on many alternative and supplemental therapy options. The NCCIH provides guidance about researching complementary approaches and what current research shows about their efficacy. There are also helpful articles on this site. For more information, visit the NIH’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain> .

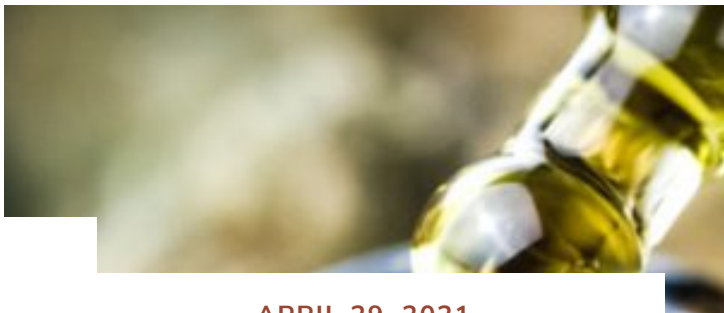
You can also do an internet search or ask your doctor if there is a center of integrative health in your area.

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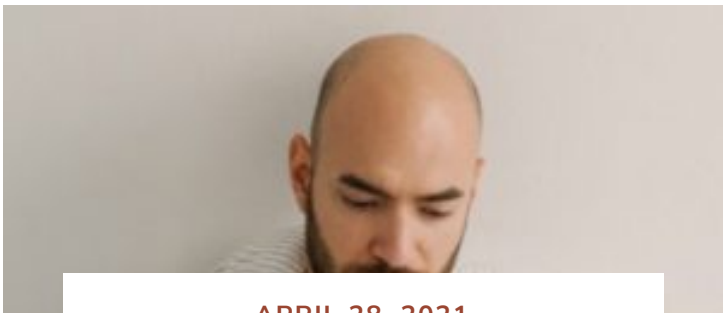
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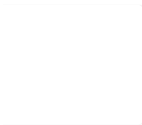
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