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Using Integrative Medicine in Pain Management: An Evaluation of Current Evidence.

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Abstract

Complementary medicine therapies are frequently used to treat pain conditions such as headaches and neck, back, and joint pain. Chronic pain, described as pain lasting longer than 3-6 months, can be a debilitating condition that has a significant socioeconomic impact. Pharmacologic approaches are often used for alleviating chronic pain, but recently there has been a reluctance to prescribe opioids for chronic noncancer pain because of concerns about tolerance, dependence, and addiction. As a result, there has been increased interest in integrative medicine strategies to help manage pain and to reduce reliance on prescription opioids to manage pain. This article offers a brief critical review of integrative medical therapies used to treat chronic pain, including nutritional supplements, yoga, relaxation, tai chi, massage, spinal manipulation, and acupuncture. The goal of this article is to identify those treatments that show evidence of efficacy and to identify gaps in the literature where additional studies and controlled trials are needed. An electronic search of the databases of PubMed, The Cochrane Library, EMBASE, PsycINFO, and Science Citation Index Expanded was conducted. Overall, weak positive evidence was found for yoga, relaxation, tai chi, massage, and manipulation. Strong evidence for acupuncture as a complementary treatment for chronic pain that has been shown to decrease the usage of opioids was found. Few studies were found in which integrative medicine approaches were used to address opioid misuse and abuse among chronic pain patients. Additional controlled trials to address the use of integrative medicine approaches in pain management are needed.

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