

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

December 2001

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)

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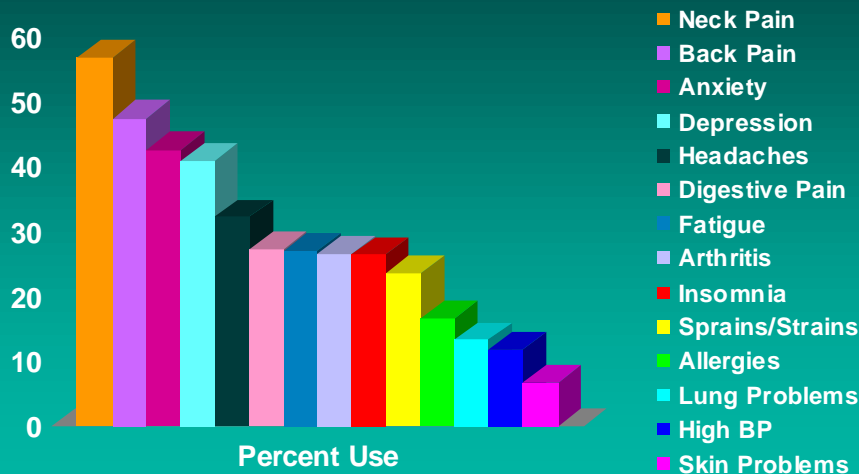
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Most Frequent Medical Conditions Treated Alternatively



The Chart above illustrates use of alternative treatments in addition to medical treatment. Data is from Eisenberg DM et al. (1998) Trends in Alternative Medicine Use in the United States, 1990-1997, *JAMA*, vol 280, #18, 1569-1575.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine and Aging

Alaska Commission on Aging Director, Dr. Lyn Freeman, presented Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research and the Aging Population at the Alaska Health Summit 2001 in Anchorage at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel December 3-5. In this and future issues of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger*, we present an abstract of Dr. Freeman's presentation.

Complementary Alternative Medicine is gaining popularity as a means of treating a variety of conditions and ailments, including counteracting or slowing the negative impacts of aging. While commonly thought of as opposed to each other, conventional and alternative methods are now being used together by more doctors and their patients.

Allopathic, Complementary, Integrated

Medicine may be described as either allopathic or complementary. Allopathic medicine is (Continued on Page 2.)

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conventional western medicine, its scientific methods and the western approach to healthcare. Allopathic medicine is “conventional” medicine. Complementary medicine describes those practices used for prevention and treatment of disease that historically have not been widely taught in medical schools, generally available in hospitals, or a component of “conventional” medicine. Complementary methods are supportive of, and additional to, allopathic medical practices and cross-cut molecular biology, prevention and primary health care.

Integrated Medicine combines allopathic and complementary systems and their underlying assumptions to form a broader concept of healthcare. For example, many pain management programs have interwoven the psychological and medical, so that if a patient feels pain, they are treated for pain, even if a physical reason is not readily apparent.

Medicine tends to follow two systems or models. The first model emphasizes treating specific illnesses with specific medicines. The second model emphasizes strengthening the body’s natural ability to heal itself through simultaneously treating the person’s mind, emotions, body and spirit. The second model strongly emphasizes prevention, individualized changes in lifestyle, diet, exercise, and patient responsibility.

Historically, conventional medicine tends to follow the first model and complementary therapies the second model. Today, with the emphasis on integrated medicine, individuals in both camps support, to varying degrees, components of both models.

Use of alternative medicines and therapies is on the rise. Those who tend to use these therapies are either interested in prevention and controlling the ravages of aging, or are dealing with chronic disease. Among the most popular alternative therapies are herbal medicine, massage, megavitamins, self-help groups, folk remedies, energy healing, and homeopathy. Alternative treatments are most often used for back pain, anxiety, depression and headache. They are also used by patients with cancer, arthritis, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and gastrointestinal problems, chronic renal failure and eating disorders.

The medical community is becoming more interested in exploring alternative treatments. According to the National Institutes of Health, over 50% of conventional physicians use complementary and alternative treatments or refer their patients to practitioners who do. Eighty percent of medical students say they want further training in complementary and alternative practices. Classes in these subjects are now taught at more than 50 Universities Nationwide. In U.S. Universities, health related courses such as massage therapy and therapeutic touch are taught as separate classes, or are integrated as part of training for nurses and other health professionals. Classes in stress reduction, relaxation, imagery, hypnosis, and biofeedback are offered as part of medical, psychology or social work degrees or as individualized certification courses.

A Brief Description of Some Alternative Therapies

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is one of the most researched forms of complementary therapies in the world today, and the one most accepted by conventional physicians. Acupuncture acts on the nervous system, and causes biochemical and systemic changes to relieve pain. It has been used to relieve nausea from operations and chemotherapy, to reduce symptoms of asthma, as a method of recovering from stroke, and for detoxification after substance abuse.

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Chiropractic

Chiropractic manipulates and adjusts the body, particularly the spinal cord, to restore normal nerve function. It is often used to relieve lower back pain, neck pain and headaches.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is based on three principles:

1. Principle of Similars (like cures Like): If a large dose of a substance induces specific disease symptoms in a healthy person, then a small dose of the same substance will cure the disease in those who are ill with those symptoms.
2. Principle of Infinitesimal Dose (the more dilute the dose, the more potent its curative effects): The dose is often so dilute that there is not a single molecule of the original substance remaining. Homeopaths believe that the continued dilution and vigorous shaking of the dose imprints an electromagnetic signal of a substance in the water. This is why homeopathy is one of the most controversial of the various complementary medicines.
3. Principle of Specificity: The remedy must match the symptom profile of the patient. The selected remedy is believed to match the sick person's electromagnetic field, resulting in a stimulation of the body's healing force.

Homeopathy is often used to treat migraines, arthritis, diarrhea, fibromyalgia, influenza and asthma.

Next Month: Alternative Medicines and Methods Continued: biofeedback, hypnosis, medication, imaging, herbal supplements.

Family Caregiver Follow-Up: Sterling Senior Center

Due to space restrictions in last month's issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger*, we were unable to highlight the work Alaska Commission on Aging grantees already do to support family caregivers in their area. One such effort is ongoing at the Sterling Senior Center.

The Sterling Senior Center has a practicing Caregiver Support Group that was formed before 1996. They meet on a monthly basis, the first Thursday of the month at 1:00 P.M. This informal group discussion panel "helps with a listening ear", steering individuals to appropriate agencies for needs assessments, guest speakers from time to time and genuine caring for the problems caregivers experience. They are a growing group and pull from the surrounding communities in our efforts. This group has been a real asset to the Sterling Senior Center.

Senior Advocacy Coalition Holds Monthly Teleconferences

The Senior Advocacy Coalition meets by teleconference from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on the second Friday of every month to address issues affecting Alaska's seniors. The teleconference originates at the Anchorage Senior Center.

For more information on joining a meeting, contact Sue Samet, 261-4140, Lila Berry, 261-4848, or Brenda Brown, 338-6492 in Anchorage; Fred Lau 235-7355 in Homer; or Rosemary Hagevig 463-6153 in Juneau.

