

Use of and Interest in Integrative Medicine Strategies

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Integrative medicine is an approach to health care that uses conventional medicine and appropriate complementary therapies (i.e., integrative medicine strategies) to care for the whole person. Integrative medicine strategies include therapies such as chiropractic care, massage therapy, acupuncture, and meditation. In January and February 2022, the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging asked a national sample of adults age 50–80 about their interest in and experiences with integrative medicine strategies.

Use and interest

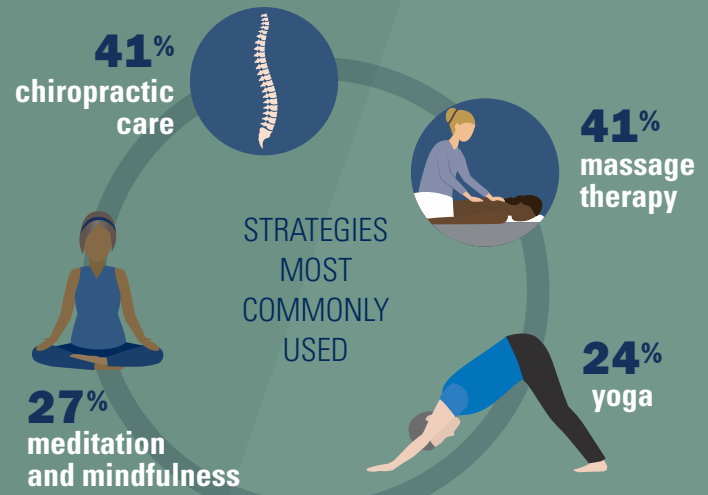
Two in three adults age 50–80 (66%) reported using at least one integrative medicine strategy to prevent or treat a health concern (38% currently, 28% in the past), 21% had an interest in trying them, and 13% had not used any integrative medicine strategies nor had interest in trying them. The most common integrative medicine strategies used (either currently or in the past) included massage therapy (41%), chiropractic care (41%), meditation and mindfulness (27%), yoga (24%), and acupuncture (16%). Women were more likely than men to currently use integrative medicine strategies (44% vs. 31%), as were those age 50–64 compared with those age 65–80 (41% vs. 35%).

Among older adults who had used one or more integrative medicine strategies, 91% found them beneficial (38% very, 53% somewhat).

Most older adults who had used an integrative medicine strategy reported using it to address physical symptoms such as pain, insomnia, or digestive issues; for an acute injury; for relaxation

Use of integrative medicine strategies AMONG ADULTS AGE 50–80

66% ever used



and stress management; for chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or obesity; and/or for a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety.

The main reason cited for using chiropractic care was for physical symptoms (57%). The main reasons for using massage therapy and yoga were relaxation (38% and 32%, respectively) and addressing

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physical symptoms (28% and 28%, respectively). Older adults reported the main reasons for using meditation and mindfulness were for relaxation (32%), stress management (26%), and mental health (24%). Nearly all adults age 50–80 (96%) reported that they believe that the mind (mental status) impacts health (82% major, 14% minor).

Communication with health care providers

Nearly one in five adults age 50–80 (18%) had talked to a health care provider about integrative medicine strategies. Those who had ever used integrative strategies were more likely to have talked to their doctor about using them than those who had never used them (25% vs. 5%).

The majority (87%) of all adults age 50–80 said they would be comfortable (41% very, 46% somewhat) talking to a health care provider about integrative medicine strategies.

Among older adults who currently use chiropractic care, three in ten (30%) said a health care provider suggested it, while this was true of 29% currently using massage therapy, 23% using yoga, and 21% using meditation and mindfulness.

One in four older adults overall (26%) said their health care provider asks about lifestyle factors such as exercise, sleep, and nutrition at all medical visits, 29% at most visits, 31% at some visits, and 14% never. Those who said their primary care provider talked about lifestyle factors at all or most visits were more likely to use integrative medicine strategies than those whose primary care providers talked about lifestyle factors less often (42% vs. 33%).

Sources of information

Among adults age 50–80 who had used an integrative medicine strategy, 40% received information about it from a family member or friend, 34% from the internet, 31% from a primary care provider, and 12% from another type of health care provider. Among all older adults, the most commonly reported sources of information about

integrative medicine strategies were a primary care provider, the internet, family or friend, or other type of health care provider; more than one in three older adults (37%) said they did not get information on integrative medicine strategies from any source.

Insurance coverage and barriers

Among older adults who use or have an interest in using integrative medicine strategies, 15% said their insurance covered these benefits, 19% reported these strategies were not covered by their insurance, and 66% were unsure. Among those who said insurance did not cover these types of services or were unsure about their coverage, 84% said they would be likely (34% likely, 50% somewhat likely) to try integrative medicine strategies if they had health insurance coverage for them.

Fewer than one in five older adults had talked to a health care provider about integrative medicine strategies, yet 87% said they would be comfortable doing so.

The main reasons cited for no longer using integrative medicine strategies or not having an interest in trying them were no interest/no need (33%), cost (27%), not knowing about them (26%), not believing they work (18%), and not knowing how to access them (13%).

Implications

Integrative medicine is an approach to health care that utilizes a range of conventional and complementary therapies as a part of whole-person care. This poll found that integrative

medicine strategies are currently being used by nearly two in five adults age 50–80 to prevent or treat a health concern, and that the vast majority of those using them say these strategies are beneficial for helping with physical symptoms as well as for relaxation, stress management, and mental health. Women, adults age 50–64, and those whose primary care doctor talked about lifestyle factors at most or all visits were more likely to use integrative medicine strategies.

This poll also highlighted opportunities to support shared decision-making about integrative approaches in health care encounters. Fewer than one in five older adults have had conversations with their health care provider about using integrative medicine strategies. Yet, the majority of older adults would feel comfortable having such conversations, and those who had discussed integrative strategies with their provider were more likely to use them. Facilitating conversations between providers and patients about integrative strategies could expand the tools available for treating and preventing illness, as well as supporting overall health and wellness.

Health care providers should routinely ask their patients if they are using any integrative medicine strategies and discuss if such strategies could be beneficial for their situation.

More than one in four older adults who were no longer using integrative medicine strategies or were interested in trying them but had never done so cited cost as a barrier. Most older adults who use or have an interest in using integrative medicine strategies said they were either not covered under their health insurance or they did not know if they were covered. These findings suggest opportunities to help older adults better understand insurance coverage and out-of-pocket costs for these strategies.

For some older adults with common health concerns such as anxiety, stress, and insomnia, integrative medicine approaches may be particularly helpful. Facilitating conversations about integrative strategies in primary care and removing barriers to these strategies when they are most likely to yield benefits may expand options for improving older adults' health and well-being.

Data Source and Methods

This National Poll on Healthy Aging report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by NORC at the University of Chicago for the University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. National Poll on Healthy Aging surveys are conducted using NORC's AmeriSpeak probability-based panel. This survey module was administered online and via phone between January and February 2022 to a randomly selected, stratified group of U.S. adults age 50–80 (n=2,277). The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. The completion rate was 68% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 1 to 3 percentage points for questions asked of the full sample and higher among subgroups.

Findings from the National Poll on Healthy Aging do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

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