

An Introduction to  
Complementary and Alternative  
Therapies (CAM)





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*Note: The following is provided for general informational purposes only and is not intended to replace advice from a qualified health care provider. The material contains references to websites created, maintained, and controlled by other organizations. These web links/references are provided for information only and are not intended as an endorsement by the Holistic Health Research Foundation of Canada nor as a warranty of the information they contain.*



## Introduction

This guide is not intended as a comprehensive source on complementary and alternative therapies (also referred to as complementary and alternative medicine – or CAM). Rather, it is a brief introduction to some of the most commonly used CAM systems, modalities, body-based therapies, stress management techniques and energetic medicine for those who are unfamiliar with CAM.

In addition, it provides the reader with information about some of the emerging issues in CAM such as research and regulation of practitioners. We have also included some questions you might ask yourself and your practitioner if you are in search of the appropriate complementary therapy for your condition or simply to improve or maintain your health and vitality.



## What is CAM?

The simplest and most common definition of CAM is that it is a diverse group of medical and health care systems, practices, products and modalities not usually considered to be part of conventional medicine. This definition is becoming increasingly outdated as medical schools are beginning to include CAM in their curriculum. In addition, as the evidence base for the safety and efficacy of some CAM practices begins to emerge, conventional medicine is selectively including some CAM practices in the health care system.

Only a minority of the public use CAM as an “alternative” to conventional medicine, with the majority of users choosing to utilize it together with (complementary to) conventional approaches. When CAM is used in conjunction with conventional medicine it is also referred to as “integrative” or “collaborative” medicine.

Given the diverse origins of CAM practices (many originated in non-Western cultures), training and educational standards for CAM practitioners vary widely. Consequently, some CAM practitioners are regulated by provincial legislation and others are not. This varies in Canada by province since the regulation of health care practitioners is under provincial jurisdiction. In addition, the level of organization for CAM practices and practitioners and practices also varies. Those that are regulated tend to be better organized with both federal and provincial organizations. CAM practitioners who are not regulated may or may not have federal or provincial organizations. (More information about regulation, organizations, and education and training will be provided in the sections of this guide that describe a few of the various CAM systems and modalities).



## **CAM and Research**

Since the early 1990's, the concept of evidence-based medicine (EBM) has increasingly dominated the provision of health care. There are many different definitions of EBM but basically it means that all health and medical care should be based on the best evidence available.

Evidence-based medicine consists of a hierarchy of different research methodologies. Almost at the top of the pile are Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs). An RCT is a study in which the participants are randomly assigned to two groups—the treatment group and the group which will receive no treatment, referred to as the control group. The control group would receive a placebo instead of treatment. RCTs are considered to be the “gold standard” of research evidence.

RCTs were originally designed to test the effectiveness of pharmaceuticals. When the RCT is applied to CAM therapies some problems emerge. For example, how would researchers design an RCT to test the effectiveness of acupuncture, massage, or Traditional Chinese Medicine where it is difficult or impossible to give the control group a placebo? In some cases it is possible to test CAM therapies using the RCT, which may, for example, be appropriate for testing the efficacy of herbs, since the control group could be given a placebo. Currently, efforts are underway in Canada and worldwide to find more appropriate research methods to assess the safety and effectiveness of CAM.

Where there are a number of RCTs in one area, a systematic review or meta-analysis is carried out. A meta-analysis is a statistical technique where researchers combine data from all the available clinical trials on a single issue, to give us an overview of whether something is helpful or harmful. A meta-analysis is considered the top level of evidence and frequently used for decision making by doctors and health policy makers.

A good meta-analysis is a useful tool. It can help put apparently contradictory studies into perspective, and allow doctors to provide their patients with an overview of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of treatments. In an era of information overload, where thousands of new medical papers are being published every day, such a summary paper or “study of studies”



reduces the amount of reading necessary to keep abreast of new developments. But a major problem with this approach is that if a meta-analysis includes badly designed studies, the result is still inconclusive.

Another difficulty with existing CAM research is that studies are sometimes designed by mainstream medical researchers unfamiliar with the way the CAM therapy they are investigating is normally practiced. An example is an RCT of acupuncture for the pain of rheumatoid arthritis, where single point acupuncture (1 needle only) was used [David et al. *Rheumatology*. 1999 Sep;38(9):864-9]. Since no well trained acupuncture practitioner would use a simple protocol like this to treat such a complex systemic disease, the negative findings of this study do not reflect 'real world' practice and are therefore invalidated.

Because of this problem it is now generally recognized that CAM practitioners need to be involved in designing clinical studies of CAM.

**Resources:**

National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine  
[www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

Cochrane Reviews  
[www.cochranelibrary.com](http://www.cochranelibrary.com)



## Regulation of Natural Health Products

In response to growing concerns about the regulatory environment for dietary supplements such as herbal medicines, vitamins and minerals, Health Canada developed a new regulatory framework for these products which came into effect January 1, 2004. The new regulations are the result of extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders, including practitioners, manufacturers and consumers, and *“are intended to ensure that all Canadians have ready access to natural health products that are safe, effective and of high quality, while respecting freedom of choice and philosophical and cultural diversity.”*

Previously, dietary supplements were classified under *the Foods and Drugs Act and Regulations* either as foods, which precluded any health claims, or as drugs, which made them subject to costly trials. Under the new framework, dietary supplements are regulated as a separate category of drugs, called natural health products, with its own supervisory authority at Health Canada – the *Natural Health Products Directorate*. The new regulations call for improved labelling, good manufacturing practices, product and site licensing, and allow for a full range of health claims, when supported by the Directorate’s *Standards of Evidence (SOE)* for the evaluation of safety and claims for natural health products.

The products that fall within the new regulations include herbal medicines, homeopathic medicines, vitamins, minerals, traditional medicines, probiotics, amino acids and essential fatty acids. All natural health products in Canada require a product license before being marketed. For site licensing, there has been two-year transition period (2004-2005) and for product licensing, a six-year transition period (2004-2009) for products that already have drug identification numbers (DIN). This will allow manufacturers, labellers, packagers, importers and distributors time to meet the new requirements.

Obtaining a product license will require detailed information on the product submitted to Health Canada, including medicinal ingredients, source, potency, non-medicinal ingredients and recommended use. Once a product has been assessed by Health Canada, the product label will bear a product license number preceded by the distinct letters NPN, or, in the case of a



homeopathic medicine, by the letters DIN-HM. The product license number on the label will inform consumers that the product has been reviewed and approved by Health Canada.

With improved standardized labelling, consumers will be able to make more informed decisions about the natural health products they buy. Labels will be required to specify directions for use, the recommended use or purpose (health claim), medicinal and non-medicinal ingredients, and any cautions, contra-indications or known adverse reactions associated with the product.

For further information on the regulatory framework, contact:

Natural Health Products Directorate, Health Canada  
2936 Baseline Road  
Qualicum Tower A  
Postal Locator: 3302A  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

613-948-8096 (Ottawa) or 1-888-774-5555  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/nhpd-dpsn/](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/nhpd-dpsn/)



## **Complete Medical Systems**

*Complete medical systems are entire systems of theory and practice (much like Western or conventional medicine). Some are traditional systems of medicine that have evolved in other cultures around the world (e.g., Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic Medicine). Others have developed in the Western world parallel or prior to Western medicine (e.g., Naturopathic Medicine, Homeopathy and Aboriginal Healing Systems.) The following are a few examples of some of these complete medical systems.*

### **Naturopathic Medicine**

Naturopaths are primary health care practitioners who use natural methods and substances to support and stimulate the body's inherent self-healing processes. Symptoms of disease are perceived as warning signals of improper functioning of the body and unhealthy lifestyle habits or behaviours. The primary goal of naturopathic medicine is to treat the underlying cause of the disease.

Naturopaths are the "general practitioners" of CAM. They are trained in a variety of healing systems and therapies which work synergistically to achieve their effect. These include: botanical medicine, clinical nutrition, homeopathy, lifestyle counselling and stress management, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and physical therapies (e.g. hydrotherapy, light and massage). A naturopath will examine, diagnose and provide a treatment protocol unique to each patient and their health condition.

Registered naturopaths have completed three years of pre-medical study at the university level. This is followed by four years of full time naturopathic education at an accredited college. After graduation, they must pass rigorous board examinations which are standardized across North America.

In Canada, naturopathic practice is regulated under provincial law in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. Alberta regulations are pending and expected to be completed by 2008. All other provinces and territories are actively pursuing regulation. In April 2006, at the request of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) submitted a report entitled "Regulation of Health Professions in Ontario: New Directions."

In the report, HPRAC recommends that naturopaths and homeopaths should be regulated under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*, and that a College of Naturopaths and Homeopaths of Ontario should be established. (Naturopaths in Ontario are currently regulated under the Drugless Practitioners Act.)

**Resources:**

Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors (CAND)  
[www.naturopathicassoc.ca](http://www.naturopathicassoc.ca)

The College of Naturopathic Physicians of British Columbia (CNPBC)  
[www.cnpbc.bc.ca](http://www.cnpbc.bc.ca)

Ontario Board of Directors, Drugless Therapy – Naturopathy (BDDT-N)  
[www.BoardofNaturopathicMedicine.on.ca](http://www.BoardofNaturopathicMedicine.on.ca)

British Columbia Naturopathic Association (BCNA)  
[www.bcna.ca](http://www.bcna.ca)

Manitoba Naturopathic Association  
[gordsims@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:gordsims@mb.sympatico.ca)

Saskatchewan Association of Naturopathic Practitioners  
[www.sanp.ca](http://www.sanp.ca)

Alberta Association of Naturopathic Practitioners  
[www.naturopathic-alberta.com](http://www.naturopathic-alberta.com)

Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors (OAND)  
[www.oand.org](http://www.oand.org)

**Colleges:**

Boucher Institute of Naturopathic Medicine  
200-668 Carnarvon Street  
New Westminster, British Columbia V3M 5Y6  
[www.binm.org](http://www.binm.org)



The Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine  
1255 Sheppard Avenue East  
Toronto, Ontario M2K 1E2  
416-498-1255 or 1-866-241-2266  
[www.ccnm.edu](http://www.ccnm.edu)

### **Traditional Chinese Medicine**

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a complete medical (or healing) system with origins dating back several millennia. The primary assumption underlying TCM is that the body's health relies on the balance of two inseparable but opposing forces—yin and yang. Disease is caused by an imbalance of yin and yang. Yin energy represents the slow, cold, passive force (or principle) whereas yang energy represents the hot, excited or active principle. When the yin and the yang energies are out of balance in the body, blockages in the flow of Qi (or vital energy) develop along the pathways known in TCM as meridians.

A traditional Chinese practitioner relies on a variety of methods to bring the body back into balance; these include: acupuncture, herbs, massage and manipulation as well as nutritional therapies and martial arts such as Tai Chi and Qi Gong. He or she may also use moxibustion, which is the application of heat using the burning of an herb called moxa at an acupuncture point.

Currently, TCM is regulated only in British Columbia. However, in November 2006, legislation regulating the practice of TCM in Ontario passed third and final reading and will become law once it receives Royal Assent. TCM will be the first new health profession to be regulated in the province of Ontario since 1991. As a result of the legislation, a self-governing regulatory college will be created with the authority to set standards of practice and entry to practice requirements for the profession.

Under this new Ontario legislation, the performance of acupuncture will be restricted to members of the new College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario, members of certain other regulated health professions (chiropractic, chiropractic, massage therapy, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, dentistry); those regulated under the Drugless Practitioners Act (e.g., naturopaths); and persons who perform acupuncture within a health facility.



Currently, education and training of TCM practitioners tends to vary widely. So far there are no national standards for licensing and accreditation of TCM practitioners in Canada, as there are in the U.S.

### **Resources:**

The Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute  
[www.afcinstitute.com](http://www.afcinstitute.com)

The Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture Association of Canada  
[www.cmaac.ca](http://www.cmaac.ca)

College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and  
Acupuncturists of British Columbia  
[www.ctcma.bc.ca](http://www.ctcma.bc.ca)

### **Ayurvedic Medicine**

Ayurvedic Medicine (also called Ayurveda) is one of the world's oldest medical systems. Ayurveda originated in India and has evolved over thousands of years. The term Ayurveda combines two Sanskrit words—"ayur," which means life, and "veda," which means science. Ayurveda means the "science of life." Similar to Traditional Chinese Medicine, the major goal of Ayurvedic Medicine is to balance the forces that influence the mind, body and spirit. When these forces are in harmony, individuals achieve harmony and good health.

One of the major concepts in Ayurveda is "prana." Prana (which means "before breath") is an underlying energy or vital force that Ayurvedic Medicine believes all of life is based on. (This is similar to the Traditional Chinese Medicine concept of Qi.) Prana is the source of the five elements recognized by Ayurveda: fire, earth, water, air and ether (space). These elements make up all the matter in the universe; they are the building blocks of the human body. The five elements are condensed into three forces, or humours, called vata (wind), kapha (phlegm) and pitta (bile). The interactions of these forces are used to describe the workings of the human body. Together, these forces are called the tridosha. The basic aim of Ayurvedic treatments is to maintain the proper balance of the tridosha.

Once a person's body constitution is determined, the practitioner will prescribe treatment to gently assist digestion and the absorption of nutrients as well as to facilitate circulation and elimination. Treatments can include a combination of dietary changes, herbal medicines, cleansing therapies, chakra therapy, massage, meditation and possibly incense.

Ayurvedic practitioners are not regulated by legislation anywhere in Canada. To qualify in India, physicians must take a five-year university level course.

## **Homeopathy**

Homeopathic medicine was founded by a German physician named Samuel Hahnemann near the end of the 18th century. The foundational assumption of homeopathic medicine is that the symptoms of illness are the body's attempt to restore homeostatic balance and reflect a natural healing process. An initial consultation with a homeopath could be quite lengthy (up to two hours) since he or she is seeking to identify idiosyncratic patterns rather than the standardized signs of disease that a conventional practitioner would look for. Based on answers to questions (such as changes in emotional states, cravings, the time of day that symptoms worsen or dissipate, and whether changes in the weather alter symptoms) homeopaths will prescribe remedies designed to stimulate the body's natural healing response.

There are two basic principles underlying the practice of homeopathic medicine. The first is called the Law of Similars. Since homeopathy literally means "like illness," the Law of Similars refers to the belief that "like cures like." Hence, a homeopathic practitioner will prescribe highly diluted doses of natural substances, which, if taken in larger quantities would produce symptoms similar to the ones the patient already has.

The second major principle of homeopathy is called the Law of Infinitesimals. This principle relies on the assumption that the more diluted a homeopathic remedy, the stronger it is. Homeopathic remedies are systematically diluted to tiny doses. Between each dilution, the remedy is succussed (shaken vigorously).



Homeopathic combination remedies are sold in some drug and health food stores. These over-the-counter remedies are not carefully matched to specific symptoms. Instead, they contain combinations of different remedies that are most commonly prescribed for particular illnesses. Despite this broad-spectrum approach, these remedies carry little risk of side effects because they are so diluted. It is best to visit a qualified homeopath for more effective treatment.

Homeopathic practitioners are not currently regulated by any province in Canada, however, as noted above, a recommendation has recently been made by HPRAC to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a new regulatory College of Naturopaths and Homeopaths of Ontario.

**Resources:**

Canadian Association of Homeopathic Physicians  
107-10230  
10204A – 152nd Street  
Surrey, British Columbia V3R 6N7  
604-951-9987

Canadian Society of Homeopaths  
[www.wchs.info/CanadianSocietyofHomeopaths.htm](http://www.wchs.info/CanadianSocietyofHomeopaths.htm)

The National United Professional Association of Trained Homeopaths (Canada) – NUPATH  
[www.nupath.org](http://www.nupath.org)

Syndicat professionnel des homéopathes du Québec  
1600 rue de Lorinier, bureau 382  
Montréal, Québec H2K 3W5  
514-525-2037 or 1-800-465-5788

**North American Aboriginal Healing Traditions**

The Aboriginal Peoples of North America come from a variety of different cultures. There is no single healing tradition that can be called Aboriginal medicine. However, many of the different traditions share common ideas and images. A central belief is that healing is a holistic process. Physical healing requires spiritual,

mental and emotional healing. The four quarters of the medicine wheel, a symbol that some native elders and healers use to speak about healing, can represent these four aspects of life.

The circle of the medicine wheel symbolizes another important feature of many Aboriginal healing traditions: the healing circle. Frequently used in Aboriginal gatherings, healing circles allow participants to speak to their community and find, as well as offer, support. The healing circle reflects the emphasis that many Aboriginal healing traditions place on people's connection to their community. Many Aboriginal traditions teach that personal or physical healing will only occur when people work to heal their relationships with the world around them.

Because of this emphasis on community, most Aboriginal healers only work with other Aboriginal people. Even healers who work with non-Aboriginal people usually expect the latter to commit to Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and the idea of shared community.

Medicinal herbs are widely used by Aboriginal healers. Four herbs used frequently at First Nations gatherings are tobacco, cedar, sage and sweet grass. These herbs are smudged, meaning they are burnt to release them in the air. The purpose of smudging is to integrate the herbs with the surrounding environment as well as to link participants with that environment and each other. Participants become linked when they breathe in the herb, making it a part of their bodies. Sweat lodges and other ceremonies involving dancing, singing and chanting are also used in the healing traditions of Aboriginal cultures. How each ceremony is performed varies across North America and depends on the Aboriginal people involved.

To begin a healing journey in a native North American tradition you must find an elder or healer to guide you. Contacting an elder from your own band or nation is a good place to start. For those without close links to their home communities, Aboriginal communities across Canada are served by a network of clinics and healing centres that offer support and treatment to Aboriginal people. These agencies offer access to Aboriginal healers and help Aboriginal people find a range of services to deal holistically with their illness. In some cases, if the individual desires, such agencies may also assist with accessing conventional Western treatment.



**Resources:**

National Aboriginal Health Organization  
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1200  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9  
613-237-9462 or 1-877-602-4445  
Fax: 613-237-1810  
[naho@naho.ca](mailto:naho@naho.ca)

The Aboriginal Multi-Media Society  
[www.ammsa.com](http://www.ammsa.com)



## **Stand-alone Therapies or Modalities**

*Medical systems like Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathic Medicine and TCM offer users a spectrum of treatment options and a philosophical system in which to understand them. This section describes treatments that might have originated from complete medical systems but are now used as stand-alone therapies. In some cases, these are ancient therapies that are still closely tied to traditional systems. Yoga, an important component of Ayurveda, is one example. Most people who use it are not familiar with broader Ayurvedic medical principles.*

### **Acupuncture**

Although Traditional Chinese Medicine would not separate out acupuncture from other components of their system, acupuncture is included in the scope of practice of other health care professionals, including medical doctors, dentists, chiropractors and naturopaths. While some of these practitioners may be trained in and practice classical Chinese acupuncture, others practice what is sometimes referred to as medical or anatomical acupuncture.

In TCM, acupuncture is considered a method of balancing the body's energy (Qi) by inserting needles under the skin at specific points along energy pathways (meridians), to prevent or cure diseases and/or disorders. The improved energy produced by this procedure is thought to stimulate the body's natural healing abilities. The modern scientific explanation recognizes that the inserted needles stimulate the nervous system to release chemicals in the muscles, spinal cord, and brain. These chemicals can change the perception of pain, and trigger the release of other chemicals and hormones which have been shown to influence the body's innate ability to heal.

Medical acupuncture refers to the incorporation of acupuncture into Western medicine. Its practice is based on Asian sources, and the choice of points at which needles are inserted is often based on the traditional approaches to encouraging the flow of Qi. But points may be chosen based on knowledge of neuroanatomy and physiology.



Acupuncture needles are metal and hair-thin. Most people feel no pain or minimal pain when the needles are being inserted. But a small minority do experience pain or discomfort. Individual reactions vary: Some patients find acupuncture relaxing, and may fall asleep during their treatment, while others feel energized.

The education and training of acupuncture practitioners tends to vary widely. So far there are no national standards for licensing and accreditation of TCM practitioners in Canada as there are in the U.S.

Under the new Ontario legislation (see page 11), the performance of acupuncture will be restricted to members of the new College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario, members of certain other regulated health professions and to persons who perform acupuncture within a health facility.

### **Resources:**

The Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute  
[www.afcinstitute.com](http://www.afcinstitute.com)

Ordre des acupuncteurs du Québec  
1001 boul. De Maisonneuve, bureau 585  
Montréal, Québec H2L 4P9  
514-523-2282 or 1-800-474-5914

*See page 11, Traditional Chinese Medicine, for additional resources.*

### **Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy involves essential oils extracted from plants to treat illness and improve overall well-being. These essential oils are usually inhaled or applied to the skin; they can be added to hot water and inhaled as steam or used in a bath or shower. They can also be added to various vegetable oils to create a massage lotion. Essential oils are very concentrated and can burn the skin if not properly diluted. Only a few drops are required for each treatment. Never ingest or swallow an undiluted essential oil unless it has been specially prepared for ingestion. Ingesting essential oils can lead to serious health complications.



Essential oils can be purchased at health food stores. However, an aromatherapist, herbalist or naturopath will work out an individual mixture of essential oils to treat specific conditions. Aromatherapists may combine several different oils to create a combination that is more powerful than its individual components.

Aromatherapy relies on our sense of smell. The nose contains specialized nerve cells with hair-like connections to the brain structure just above the nose called the olfactory bulb. Different olfactory nerve cells respond to different odors, and this can be seen as specific patterns of activity in the brain. Most people have experienced memories triggered by particular scents. So it is not surprising that aromas can affect mood, stress level and sense of well-being. For this reason, each person's experience with aromatherapy is highly individual. The emotional impact of different scents varies from person to person.

People who are allergic to perfumes or other scents may also be allergic to aromatherapy oils and are understandably wary about their use. Many essential oils can be toxic in large doses, and some people may be especially sensitive to their scents. This is particularly true for children as well as pregnant women.

Aromatherapists are not regulated in any province in Canada.

### **Herbal Therapies**

Herbal therapies are medically active substances harvested from plants. They may come from any part of the plant but are most commonly made from leaves, roots, seeds or flowers. They are eaten, drunk, smoked, inhaled or applied to the skin.

Pharmaceutical drugs are often derived from plants, and are made by isolating the chemicals that have a medical effect and concentrating them in the medication. Herbal therapies, on the other hand, contain all the chemical components of a plant together – as they occur in nature. This critical point about herbal medicine may explain why some herbs used by experienced practitioners for centuries have not performed well in modern clinical trials when their active chemicals are isolated from the rest of the plant.



Herbal medicines are often promoted as a gentle and non-toxic approach to good health. This does not mean herbal therapies never cause side effects or never interact with other pharmaceutical and herbal treatments. Learn enough about any herbal therapy to ensure that the dose is safe and effective. Learn about possible side effects and watch for signs of drug interactions. It is also important to inform your doctor, pharmacist and complementary therapist about all of the medications and health products you are taking – prescription and non-prescription – including herbs and supplements.

*Herbalgram*, an online and print publication produced by the non-profit American Botanical Council provides more information on the use of different types of herbs. *Herbalgram* and the US-based Alternative Medicine Foundation's website, [www.herbmed.org](http://www.herbmed.org), are useful and reliable starting points for people interested in exploring herbal therapies. Consulting a qualified herbalist is the safest way to use herbs.

Herbalists are not regulated in any province, but some are registered as naturopaths, and others are accredited through professional societies for TCM practitioners. The Canadian Association of Herbal Practitioners requires its members to complete three years of full-time study. Some institutions and associations differentiate between clinical herbal therapists and consultant herbal therapists: the former generally have more years of training and experience.

### **Resources:**

The Canadian Association of Herbal Practitioners  
1228 Kensington Road North West, Suite 400  
Calgary, Alberta T2N 4P9  
403-270-0936

Ontario Herbalists Association  
[www.herbalists.on.ca](http://www.herbalists.on.ca)



## **Body-based Therapies**

### **Swedish Massage**

Swedish massage is the form of massage most commonly available in Canada. A massage therapist is trained to assess and treat most soft tissues of the body (muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia and other connective tissues) and manipulate it to maintain, rehabilitate or augment physical function, and reduce pain. Two of the greatest physiological changes produced by massage therapy are an increase in blood circulation and in lymphatic fluid circulation.

Massage may increase the effectiveness of the immune system by increasing the distribution of lymphatic fluid. Increasing the circulation of the blood may reduce swelling, lower the heart rate and blood pressure and enhance overall health. If a client is injured (e.g., through an accident, surgery, or repetitive strain), a massage therapist can physically stretch muscles, inhibit muscle spasm, increase range of motion of joints and help break down scar tissue.

There may also be psychological and emotional benefits of massage therapy. The slow smoothing strokes of a massage therapist can reduce emotional stress and reduce stress chemicals (from the “fight-or-flight” response) in the body. The caring touch of a massage therapist can also help with relief from pain whether it is emotional or physical.

Massage therapists must complete a rigorous two to three year training program, complete examinations after graduation and be registered with a provincial health regulatory college in order to call themselves a “massage therapist” (MT) or “registered massage therapist” (RMT). Massage therapists are currently regulated in Ontario, Newfoundland/Labrador and British Columbia in Canada.

### **Resources:**

Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance  
[www.cmta.ca](http://www.cmta.ca)

College of Massage Therapists of Ontario  
[www.cmta.com](http://www.cmta.com)



College of Massage Therapists of British Columbia  
[www.cmtbc.bc.ca](http://www.cmtbc.bc.ca)

College of Massage Therapists of Newfoundland and Labrador  
[www.nlmtnb.ca](http://www.nlmtnb.ca)

Fédération québécoise des massothérapeutes  
1265 avenue du Mont-Royal Est, bureau 204  
Montréal, Québec H2J 1Y4  
514-597-0505 or 1-800-363-9606

## **Shiatsu**

Shiatsu is a form of Japanese massage that is intended to stimulate the body's own healing powers. A shiatsu therapist applies pressure to specific points on the body in order to balance the energies or the flow of Qi in the body.

At least two styles of shiatsu massage are available in Canada; practitioners may offer one or both. Masunaga shiatsu (or zen shiatsu) is closely related to other Eastern medical practices. It focuses on creating balance and harmony in the body by stimulating the flow of Qi or life energy. The second style of shiatsu is Namikoshi shiatsu, also called original shiatsu. This style combines the Western medical sciences of anatomy and physiology with the Eastern traditions of Masunaga shiatsu. Namikoshi practitioners focus on the pressure points associated with the body's endocrine system— a network of glands that distribute hormones throughout the body.

Shiatsu is not regulated in any province in Canada.

## **Resources:**

Shiatsu Therapy Association of British Columbia  
[www.shiatsutheraPy.ca](http://www.shiatsutheraPy.ca)

Shiatsu Therapy Association of Ontario  
[www.ShiatsuAsssocation.com](http://www.ShiatsuAsssocation.com)



## **Reflexology**

Reflexologists are trained to identify specific reflex points on the sole of the foot (or sometimes on the hands as well). These reflex points are thought to be connected to different parts of the body (e.g., glands, organs, shoulders, lymph system, immune system, etc.), and applying pressure to these points enhances the health of the corresponding body part. Reflexology is used to reduce stress, improve circulation and eliminate toxins.

Reflexologists are not regulated in any province. Certification of Reflexologists consists of four levels. The top level, a Master Reflexologist, requires 500 hours of training.

### **Resources:**

Reflexology Association of Canada  
[www.reflexologycanada.ca](http://www.reflexologycanada.ca)

## **Stress Management**

### *Meditation*

There are probably as many ways to meditate as there are books and tapes to learn how to do it. The goal of meditation is to calm the mind and learn to focus on the present (i.e., not the past or the future or what you are going to make for dinner). Every major religion includes some form of meditation, as do many of the complete medical systems mentioned in this guide.

The art of meditation involves becoming aware of your thoughts, observing them (without judgment) and eventually achieving mastery over them. Most meditation techniques focus on the breath. Others may involve chants or repeating mantras. You can meditate while sitting, walking, lying down, or in specific postures.

With practice and discipline, meditation can help you relax; you may also achieve a sense of calm and peace and a clearer vision of your life.



### *Tai Chi*

Tai Chi is part of the Chinese martial arts tradition. There are many forms of Tai Chi practised in Canada. One of the most common forms is Taoist Tai Chi. The slow, graceful movements of Taoist Tai Chi increase strength, flexibility and improve balance and circulation. The goal of Taoist Tai Chi is to return the body and mind to a healthy state. Tai Chi has been described as “meditation in motion” which is intended to revitalize both the mind and the body. The mental and physical discipline involved in learning and practising Tai Chi helps individuals deal with stress.

### **Resources:**

The Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada  
[www.taoist.org](http://www.taoist.org)

### *Yoga*

Yoga literally means union, union with the Self or Divine Truth. Yoga was originally developed to calm the body before meditation. The most common form of yoga is Hatha yoga. Hatha yoga consists of stretching and breath work in certain postures (asanas).

Yoga is used to establish a sense of relaxation and awareness. It may also increase oxygen consumption and reduce stress. Doing yoga on a regular basis builds muscle strength and flexibility. Yoga is also said to massage the body internally, stimulating the circulatory and endocrine systems and strengthening the lungs and digestive organs.

There are many different schools of yoga (e.g. Astanga, Iyengar, Kripalu, Kundalini, and Power Yoga).



## **Energetic Medicine**

*Therapies which use energetic medicine are based on the belief that people have their own vital energy. This energy field is believed to flow through and surround the body. Energetic medicine practitioners modify imbalances in the energy field by using their energy to redirect the energy of others. Shiatsu and acupuncture (see above) might also be considered forms of energetic medicine.*

## **Therapeutic Touch**

Therapeutic Touch is a modern version of several ancient healing techniques. It was first introduced in North America by Dolores Kreiger, Ph.D., R.N. and her colleague Dora Kunz in 1972. Practitioners use their hands (but they don't touch you) to consciously direct energy to heal imbalances in the client's energy field. Therapeutic Touch is sometimes used by nurses to relieve pain and promote relaxation.

Therapeutic Touch practitioners are not a regulated health profession. Ontario appears to have the only Therapeutic Touch organization in Canada.

## **Resources:**

Therapeutic Touch Network of Ontario  
[www.therapeutictouchnetwk.com](http://www.therapeutictouchnetwk.com)

## **Reiki**

Reiki is the Japanese word meaning universal energy (*Rei* means universal and *ki* means energy). Reiki is similar to Therapeutic Touch in the sense that practitioners direct this universal energy in and through the client's body and energy field to correct imbalances. Reiki practitioners go through three different levels of training. At level one, the practitioner learns how to practice on themselves (and others, if they wish). At level two, practitioners learn how to do distance healing. At the third level, the practitioner becomes a Master. Reiki Masters are the most powerful healers and train other practitioners.



Reiki is not a regulated health profession. Hence it is advisable to find a Reiki practitioner who has achieved the Masters level.

### **Pranic Healing**

Prana is the Ayurvedic word for the life force on which all life depends. In Pranic healing, several methods are used to balance, enhance and increase prana. Pranic healing often involves the intervention of another person, but self-healing techniques are also used. Spiritual healing techniques, such as prayer, visualization and meditation, are used to remove blockages. Breathing techniques known in yoga as pranayama are also used to enhance prana.



## Questions to Ask Yourself and Your Practitioner

It can be very difficult finding your way through the maze of complementary and alternative treatments currently available. It is also not easy to find the right practitioner or therapy for your condition. In addition, CAM can be quite costly; very few therapies are covered by extended health plans. Here are some questions you can ask yourself and your practitioner which may help you clarify which CAM therapy is most appropriate for you:

- What am I hoping to get out of this therapy?
- Is this therapy used by other people with my health condition?
- Am I able to talk to any of these people about their experiences?
- Is there any research or additional information about this therapy?
- What are the side effects of this therapy, if any?
- What sort of commitment do I have to make to use this treatment?
- Where can I get this treatment and will it be regularly available?
- How much of this treatment is too much and what are the early signs of taking too much?
- Does this treatment interact with anything else I'm taking?
- How much does it cost?

Unfortunately, the answers to some of these questions may not be readily available. It is often difficult to find information on interactions between various complementary therapies or between complementary therapies and prescription drugs. It is always wise to get information from more than one source. Do not rely solely on information provided by people who are profiting from your use of a treatment. Network—ask your friends, family or anyone you trust what their experience has been using this therapy.



## **General Resources:**

Canadian Health Network, Complementary and Alternative Health Care

[www.canadianhealthnetwork.ca](http://www.canadianhealthnetwork.ca)

Canadian Complementary Medical Association

[www.ccmadoctors.ca/index.htm](http://www.ccmadoctors.ca/index.htm)

CAM on PubMed

[www.nlm.nih.gov/nccam/camonpubmed.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/nccam/camonpubmed.html)

Alternative Medicine

[www.hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/altmed.html](http://www.hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/altmed.html)

CAMline

[www.camline.ca](http://www.camline.ca)

Centre for Complementary Health Studies

[www.ex.ac.uk/chs](http://www.ex.ac.uk/chs)

Friends of Alternative and Complementary Therapies (FACT)

[www.thefacts.org](http://www.thefacts.org)

Canadian Interdisciplinary Network for Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research

[www.incamresearch.ca](http://www.incamresearch.ca)

Passeport Sante

[www.passeportsante.net](http://www.passeportsante.net)

Rosenthal Centre for Complementary Medicine at Columbia University

[www.rosenthal.hs.columbia.edu](http://www.rosenthal.hs.columbia.edu)



## About the Holistic Health Research Foundation of Canada

Launched in late 2004, the Holistic Health Research Foundation of Canada is the first national charitable organization in Canada dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Canadians by *advancing the scientific understanding of complementary and alternative health care (CAM)*. We work collaboratively to support and fund:

- High calibre, multidisciplinary **research** in complementary therapies
- **Public awareness and education** activities regarding the safe and effective use of complementary therapies
- **Health professional training and dialogue** between complementary and conventional health professionals towards a common vision for optimal health

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# SEEKING ANSWERS, FOR YOUR HEALTH

Holistic Health Research is a new Canadian charitable organization focused on finding and sharing answers to the important questions you have about complementary therapies. Questions that could have a significant impact on your health or the health of your patients.

Our role is to explore the many potential pathways to optimal health so that you can make the most informed prevention and treatment choices possible. To do this, we are committed to funding research and providing credible research-based information about a range of complementary health therapies.

Because it is only when the information is in your hands that it can have the most impact.

*Help us explore all pathways to health – please give generously today.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DONATE:

416-778-4443/866-778-4443

[www.HolisticHealthResearch.ca](http://www.HolisticHealthResearch.ca)

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