



Complementing Your Medical Care With Approaches That Benefit Your Health

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), more than 30 percent of adults use healthcare approaches developed outside of mainstream western medicine. These approaches are called *complementary* and *alternative*—terms that are often used interchangeably. However, it is important to note that they are different.

A complementary therapy is one that is *used together* with conventional medicine, to complement it. Someone with high blood pressure may take yoga classes or do dance therapy to exercise and reduce stress, in addition to taking their daily prescribed medication.

An alternative therapy or practice is one *used in place* of conventional medicine. A person with back pain from a herniated disk may use acupuncture as treatment instead of cortisone shots or back surgery. The use of only alternative medicine is rare, but complementary approaches are increasingly common.

Complementary Approaches

Complementary therapies are those that can improve health by being enjoyable and stress-relieving, and by helping to create an overall sense of well-being. You've heard of many complementary health approaches: yoga, tai chi, qi gong, chiropractic manipulation, meditation and massage. Your KnovaSolutions clinician can provide more information about these (just give a call), but there are

a few described here that aren't mentioned as often. Some of these therapies are free or covered at least in part by insurance, and may also be considered eligible expenses for reimbursement with flexible spending accounts (FSA), health savings accounts (HSA) and health reimbursement arrangements (HRA). Be sure to check your policies for coverage and eligibility.

Laugh Out Loud

It may sound, er, funny, but laughter can ease stress, help you enjoy others and make you feel relaxed. Science backs this up; filling your heart, lungs and muscles with oxygen-rich air increases a chemical action in the brain (the release of endorphins, the feel-good hormones). Laughter can have short- and long-term effects; relieving stress strengthens the immune system and increases our ability to fight illness. A study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* revealed that when participants who were experiencing pain were shown comedic movies they reported feeling less pain. The Mayo Clinic explains that laughter causes the body to produce its own natural painkillers.

How can you bring more laughter into your life? Spending time with people you enjoy often leads to laughing and good times. You can watch sit-coms and other comedies and read funny books and comic strips. Laughter yoga classes and workshops may be available in your

Let Us Help!

Understanding which complementary therapies might work in combination with your medical care can be seem like a big research project. Let us help you figure out if one or more meets your needs and interests.

Call us today! Our office hours are Monday through Friday, 9 am to 6 pm, CST.

Call **800/355-0885**

Dance Therapy

Dance or movement therapy refers to movement that supports emotional, social, cognitive and physical health and well-being. Music (see right) when combined with dance can trigger joy; it can naturally relieve stress and result in healing.

Dance therapy is successfully used among people with special needs, anxiety, Parkinson's Disease and other conditions. Besides relieving stress, dance therapy is a form of exercise (that we can all benefit from). It can help us express emotion, improve coordination, and stimulate creativity and imagination.

The [American Dance Therapy Association](#) requires its therapists to graduate from approved graduate programs and offers levels of certification. Click on the link above to locate local dance therapists. If your provider feels dance therapy would be beneficial for you, s/he may be able to refer you. Cost varies depending upon location and class style.



The information contained in this newsletter is for general, educational purposes. It should not be considered a replacement for consultation with your healthcare provider. If you have concerns about your health, please contact your healthcare provider.

area for a fee (do an internet search to learn more). Maybe laughing more will give you a keen eye to see humor in the things around you!

Light Therapy

Using a light box can help improve symptoms of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression associated with changes in seasons. A light box puts out light that is similar to outdoor light. It causes a chemical change in the brain that can lift spirits. Light therapy is usually more effective when combined with other types of treatment, such as counseling and anti-depressant medications.

Not all light boxes are created equal; your doctor may recommend a specific one, but a prescription is not needed. The Cleveland Clinic offers information about how to select a [light box](#) especially for SAD.

Music Therapy

Even if you can't carry a tune, you probably enjoy listening to music. Music stimulates the senses. It can motivate people to complete tasks (which helps to improve self-esteem), and can have a deeply calming effect. Listening to music is associated with improved learning in schools, elevated mood, and less pain among people in hospitals and nursing homes. Because we process music on both sides of our brain, listening to it can enhance thinking, improve memory, and even help people regain speech after a stroke. Music is also a great distraction when enduring pain and performing repetitive tasks.

Music therapists are specially trained by completing an accredited program and internship. Musictherapy.org can help you find a local therapist. Musicians on Call is a national organization that brings volunteers to hospitals for performances. Hospices often include music therapy as part of their services.

Pet Therapy

Pet therapy is when dogs or other animals are used to help people recover from or better manage their health problems. Hospitals often offer dog therapy in which a dog and their handler visit rooms so that patients can enjoy the "warmth of a cold nose." These encounters often bring smiles to faces, and patients notice that they feel a little less tired and maybe a little more cheery.

Pet therapy has been linked to reducing pain, anxiety, depression and fatigue for people with a wide range of health concerns, such as those undergoing cancer treatment, living in long-term care facilities, experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, and living with dementia. Family members who are present say they receive benefit from animal visits too. Pet therapy is often available on college campuses and at community centers to help people deal with stress and anxiety. Pet owners usually volunteer their time and pet to bring a little sunshine to those who enjoy a purr or tail wag.

Art Therapy

Art therapy is a type of counseling that involves engaging with art projects (painting, drawing, sculpting, collage, etc.) to foster emotional and physical healing and growth. You do not have to have any previous art experience to participate in art therapy, and the type of art explored will be based on your interests. Like other therapies, it can help reduce pain, anxiety and stress. It promotes relaxation, offers a mode of self-expression, and assists with physical rehabilitation. Art therapists are professionals with a master's degree in art therapy; their cost varies by practitioner.

Please let KnovaSolutions help you learn more about art therapy or other complementary therapies. Call us at **800/355-0885**.