

# Traditional Medicine vs. Alternative Medicine: You Decide

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In modern Western culture, we have become accustomed to thinking of “traditional” medicine as what is practiced in mainstream doctors’ offices and hospitals. Natural or alternative medicine, by contrast, takes a holistic approach to treatment, looking at the overall person and the whole body, rather than simply the symptoms being experienced. In many cases, natural medicine works on preventing the body from becoming ill or depleted. Meanwhile, conventional medicine, in which treatments are based on the results of scientific trials, tends to treat the symptoms that patients experience, as well as some diseases. However, generally speaking, conventional medicine looks at these symptoms in isolation and usually after the illness has already occurred. Conventional medicine is also known as allopathic medicine or Western medicine. The name Western medicine came about because many of the alternative therapies and natural healing practices currently in use originate from the East.

### What is Alternative Medicine?

Although it is called alternative, traditional medicine is widely used around the world. In fact, in many countries, herbal medicines are given before conventional medical treatment. Alternative medicine has always been popular in developing countries, and its popularity in industrialized nations is increasing rapidly.

In India, the alternative medicines were known as Vedic medicines or Aired. Ayurveda has been practiced for thousands and thousands of years and is still in practice. The aim of Ayurveda medicine is balancing the harmony of mind, soul and body. Ayurveda is an alternative medicine made from herbs, certain vegetables, fruits and natural minerals. There are historical evidences that surgeries were also performed as part of ayurveda treatment in olden days. Ayurveda prescribes alternative medicines for curing common cold, stroke and paralysis and certain mental diseases.

In China, alternative medicine was practiced for centuries and its concept is based on Taoist philosophy. The practice of alternative medicine in China that also spread to Japan and Korea is known as Oriental branch of alternative medicine. The two schools that contributed to the practice of alternative medicine and therapies are “Jin角度” and “Wenbing”. You must be aware of the term “acupuncture”. This originated in China and is used to treat various orthopedic and neurological ailments and is popular even today. Chinese treated the human mind and the body and not the disease. They believed a strong human body could never fall sick.

### Uses of Traditional Medicine

Most people are familiar with the tools of conventional medicine, such as blood tests and x-rays, but what exactly does natural medicine entail? Traditional medicine may use



plant-, animal- and mineral-based products for treatment. It may also include spiritual and manual therapies.

Some types of alternative therapies include:  
*acupressure*: massage in specific areas for pain relief.

*acupuncture*: the insertion of thin, heated needles into the body to treat symptoms and balance the energy

*Chinese herbal medicine*: the use of plant-based remedies to treat or prevent illness.

*energy therapies*: the practice of channeling energy through the hands for healing. (Reiki is a type of energy therapy.)

*homeopathy*: the use of small amounts of natural remedies to treat illness.

*kinesiology*: the use of muscle tests to identify and correct imbalances in the body.

*massage therapy*: the practice of manipulating skin, muscles and joints to relieve stress and pain.

### Eastern Medicine versus Western Medicine

Debate about the merits of Eastern medicine versus Western medicine (also referred to as natural vs. allopathic medicine) has been going on for years. Arguments against the use of natural medicine focus on the lack of verifiable scientific data that proves it works. Although studies have been done on traditional Eastern medicine, many of these have been criticized for not being rigorous enough. Others have focused on the fact that the results of studies receive negative press, even when they appear to work for the target group most at risk. Other criticism focuses on the fact that people may take longer to seek conventional treatments. Instead, many people turn to natural medicines first, making it harder to achieve success with Western medicine. Issues relating to unwanted side effects of natural medicines, plus the fact that this area is virtually unregulated, are other reasons for concern. Finally, many alternative therapies are not covered by health insurance.

In the end, only the patient can decide what treatment works best for them. The important thing is that the patient seeks treatment, either natural or conventional, and that the treatment heals.

Acupuncture is another way of alternative medicine that has gained lots of popularity in United States.

IN SUMMARY THE DEBATE ABOUT THE MERIT OF EASTERN VERSUS WESTERN MEDICINE HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR CENTURIES. THE ARGUMENT AGAINST THE USE OF NATURAL MEDICINE FOCUSES ON THE LACK OF SCIENTIFIC DATA TO PROVE THE FACT OF TREATMENT. OTHER CRITICISM INCLUDES THE FACT THAT PEOPLE MAY TAKE LONGER TO SEEK REAL MEDICAL HELP UNTIL THE DISEASE PROGRESSES AND ALSO MOST OF THEM ARE NOT COVERED BY INSURANCE.