

Remedy Or Quackery?

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE BONA FIDE AND THE BOGUS IN ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE.



	HOW IT WORKS	WHEN IT'S A REMEDY	WHEN IT'S QUACKERY
ACUPUNCTURE	Practitioners insert needles along "meridians" – areas of your body linked to an ailing organ or tissue – increasing production of immune-system cells, pain-dulling endorphins, and neurotransmitters that lower blood pressure.	In a recent study, headache sufferers who were pricked experienced 50 per cent fewer tension headaches than those who were not. And men with lower-back pain felt a 19 per cent reduction in symptoms after acupuncture.	Some practitioners tout acupuncture as a means to alleviate asthma, cure depression, or help you quit smoking. Researchers disagree. To decide for yourself, go to www.tcmpb.gov.sg to find a registered acupuncturist.
CHIROPRACTIC	Chiropractors claim that subluxations – "dislocated bones" in the spine – irritate nerve endings, causing chronic pain. They apply a quick, controlled force (or adjustment) to realign the joint.	Back-cracking may lower blood pressure. In a recent study, men who underwent eight weeks of treatment experienced a 14-point drop in systolic blood pressure and an eight-point drop in diastolic pressure.	Researchers have discredited chiropractic as a cure for allergies and depression. While it was reported, in the <i>New England Journal of Medicine</i> , to ease lower-back pain, less-costly physical therapy gave the same relief.
MASSAGE THERAPY	Massage therapists manipulate muscles to increase blood flow and alleviate pain and stress. The pressure on tense tissues blocks pain signals to the brain and releases the feel-good hormone serotonin.	Studies show massage can help heat back pain, prevent migraines, lower stress and blood pressure, and even speed up healing. The most effective – and common – style of massage? The Swedish massage.	"Massage Therapy is very effective if the problem is muscular in origin. This means that it's important to find the root cause and treat it from there. If the cause is in the joint, nerve or posture, massage therapy has to be combined with physiotherapy to be effective," says Aized Noor, a certified physiotherapist at Physio Solutions.
MEDITATION	This mind-body practice uses breathing and focusing techniques to create what researchers call the "relaxation response", which may reduce the activity of the autonomic nervous system.	A recent study in the <i>Archives of Internal Medicine</i> found that people who practiced meditation experienced lower systolic blood pressure, lower fasting blood glucose, and more stable insulin levels.	It should not be promoted as a means for curing depression or anxiety, but may help you better cope with stress. For a tutorial on all things om, visit www.learningmeditation.com .
HYPNOSIS	A practitioner induces a trance-like state of relaxation, blocking out distractions and allowing you to focus intently on a single thought or suggestion – an ideal state for changing attitudes or behaviours.	A landmark study revealed that hypnosis was as effective as morphine at relieving pain and that it may help control anxiety.	"Hypnotherapy may be useful for panic attacks, phobias and social anxiety, but it may not be suitable for everyone. For moderate to severe cases of anxiety or depressive disorders, mainstream medication and psychotherapy is more effective," says Dr Adrian Wang, MBBS, a consultant psychiatrist at Gleneagles Hospital.

ALT TAKES

Uncommon cures for everyday ailments

Ayurveda

The Problem: Diabetes

How It Works: "Ayurveda is a science that focuses on holistic healthcare and includes changes in diet, lifestyle, and emotional and physical states," says Ravi Prasad, executive director at Himalaya Global Holdings. Ayurveda

practitioners believe that all diseases are caused by imbalances in an individual's life, and their treatment is designed to rebalance those wayward scales.

"Herbs such as Karela (bitter gourd) and Meshashringi (gymnema sylvestre) are recommended as a support for diabetics. Karela helps in improving sugar metabolism, while Meshashringi regulates sugar

levels," says Jayakumar PS, pharmaceutical division manager at The Himalaya Drug Company. These aren't voodoo plants being used — they've been scientifically tested to ease the severity of diabetic symptoms and also hold back advancement of the disease. "But both herbs are not replacements to medication. They simply offer better control of sugar levels," says Jakakumar.

Side-effects: "The recommended herbs have been clinically proven to have little or no side effects on long-term usage, unlike modern methods of treatment," says Jayakumar.

Where: The Ayurvedic herbs mentioned above are available at Watsons, Ngee Ann City, #B2-06, 6735-4931. To contact the Himalaya customer service hotline, call 6471-0888.