



# Alternative Therapies

By Ilana Jacqueline

**IN THE PAST**, I've tried multiple treatments for my migraines. I've taken major painkillers, over-the-counter migraine medications and even had Botox injected into my face, head and neck. But before the botulism, there was craniosacral therapy.

Nobody wants to be on expensive, side-effect-inducing and body-poisoning prescriptions. In fact, chronic illness patients will usually try anything and everything to avoid them. But, we are also the most vulnerable group to snake oil salesmen. These fast-talking, pyramid-scheming con artists use fake science, meaningless research (usually conducted by paid "scientists" of their own choosing) and claim to be able to produce incredible results such as "cure cancer" or "treat all diseases." Sound too good to be true? Good thinking. It is.

For me, holistic medicine has been kind of a roulette wheel. I grew up in a household in which holistic medicine was the first line of defense. And, boy, can I tell you that having an undiagnosed immune deficiency and trying to beat an infection with acupuncture alone can make you really, really critical of the entire concept of holistic care. Especially when you're surrounded by people who seem to respond well to holistic care and holistic care alone.

There is an increasingly popular cultural movement away from Western medicine and toward treatments that focus on preventive care and anti-medication treatments. Alone, and without examination by a licensed physician, complementary therapies can mask diseases that need urgent, timely treatment. But when performed responsibly in combination with necessary Western medical treatment, some therapies can be unspeakably beneficial to patients.

Holistic care is a wide and varied field that includes treatments such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, Bach flower therapy, biofeedback, chelation therapy, craniosacral

sense of reward than risk. Of course, there is also a greater risk of just making a total fool of yourself, too. Is chanting and chewing basil leaves under a full

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therapy, colon hydrotherapy, dietary supplements, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, massage therapy, meditation, naturopathic medicine, reflexology, Reiki and trigger point therapy — just to name a few.

When I was just out of college and bouncing between physicians and diagnoses, I was referred to a craniosacral therapist. Craniosacral therapy is a gentle, hands-on therapy that works somewhat like massage, but focuses mainly on the spinal area. The sessions would last for about one hour and would include me relaxing on a comfortable massage table, clothed, while the therapist slowly and lightly moved her hands across my back, feet and, sometimes, my jaw (if I requested it). During each session, I would tend to fall into a deep, extremely relaxed sleep, and when I woke up, my symptoms were greatly diminished.

For me, hands-on alternative treatments like this, as well as massage therapy and chiropractic care, are what work for me. It takes some digging and some experimenting to see if these treatments are beneficial. But, since many of these treatments are noninvasive, there appears to be a greater

moon really a cure for asthma?

So, how can you tell if an alternative therapy is right for you? Do your research. Start by looking up the description online, ask other patients about their experiences and then directly ask the practitioners if they've treated patients with your condition. At the end of the day, the best way to know if a treatment will work for you, ironically, works just as it would with Western medicine: by trial and error.

Don't let others discourage your exploration, and listen to your body's response: Don't keep trying to find a positive response in a treatment that just isn't providing one. ■



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