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National Institutes of Health



# NCCIH Clinical Digest

## for health professionals

### Complementary Health Approaches for Chronic Pain

September 2022



This issue of the digest summarizes current scientific evidence about the complementary health approaches most often used by people for chronic pain, including fibromyalgia, headache, irritable bowel syndrome, low-back pain, neck pain, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and cancer pain.

The scientific evidence to date suggests that some complementary health approaches may provide modest effects that may help individuals manage the day-to-day variations in their chronic pain symptoms. While some complementary approaches do show modest benefit, the amount and quality of evidence varies depending on the approach and pain condition.

#### **What the Science Says:**

## Pain Conditions and Summary of Current Research

Fibromyalgia

Headache

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Low-Back Pain

Neck Pain

Osteoarthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Cancer Pain

### Fibromyalgia

In general, research on complementary health approaches for fibromyalgia must be regarded as preliminary. However, recent systematic reviews and randomized clinical trials provide encouraging evidence that practices such as tai chi, qigong, yoga, massage therapy, acupuncture, and balneotherapy may help relieve some fibromyalgia symptoms.

[Read more about the research on fibromyalgia](#) >

## Clinical Guidelines

- [Noninvasive Treatments for Acute, Subacute, and Chronic Low Back Pain: A Clinical Practice Guideline](#) (*Annals of Internal Medicine*)
- [Practice Guidelines for Chronic Pain Management](#) (*Anesthesiology*) [699 KB PDF]
- [Treatment of Osteoarthritis of the Knee](#) (*American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*)
- [Chiropractic Management of Fibromyalgia Syndrome: Summary of Clinical Practice Recommendations](#) (*Council on Chiropractic Guidelines and Practice Parameters*) [21 KB PDF]

- Low Back Pain: Clinical Practice Guidelines Linked to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (*Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy*)
- Nonpharmacologic and Pharmacologic Therapies for Osteoarthritis of the Hand, Hip, and Knee (*American College of Rheumatology/Arthritis Foundation*)
- Migraine Headaches in Children and Adolescents (*Journal of Pediatric Health Care*)

## Scientific Literature

- Complementary Health Approaches for Chronic Pain—Systematic Reviews/Reviews/Meta-analyses (*PubMed®*)
- Complementary Health Approaches for Chronic Pain—Randomized Controlled Trials (*PubMed®*)

## Information for Your Patients

- 9 Things You Should Know About Chronic Pain and Complementary Health Approaches
- Rheumatoid Arthritis: In Depth
- Osteoarthritis: In Depth
- Massage Therapy: What You Need To Know
- Headaches: What You Need To Know
- Fibromyalgia: In Depth
- Spinal Manipulation: What You Need To Know
- Chronic Pain and Complementary Health Approaches
- Complementary Health Practices for U.S. Military, Veterans, and Families

*NCCIH Clinical Digest* is a service of the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, NIH, DHHS. *NCCIH Clinical Digest*, a monthly e-newsletter, offers evidence-based information on complementary health approaches, including scientific literature searches, summaries of NCCIH-funded research, fact sheets for patients, and more.

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health is dedicated to exploring complementary health products and

practices in the context of rigorous science, training complementary health researchers, and disseminating authoritative information to the public and professionals. For additional information, call NCCIH's Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226, or visit the NCCIH website at [nccih.nih.gov](http://nccih.nih.gov). NCCIH is 1 of 27 institutes and centers at the National Institutes of Health, the Federal focal point for medical research in the United States.

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