

Health-care providers are prescribing nontraditional medicine

May 9 2011

More than a third of Americans use some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and that number continues to rise attributed mostly to increases in the use of mind-body therapies (MBT) like yoga, meditation and deep breathing exercises.

Prior research suggests that MBT, while used by millions of patients, is still on the fringe of mainstream medical care in America. New research suggests that attitudes are changing.

In a study from Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) and Harvard Medical School, researchers found that one in 30 Americans using MBT has been referred by a medical provider.

"There's good evidence to support using mind-body therapies clinically," said lead author Aditi Nerurkar, MD, [Integrative Medicine](#) Fellow, Harvard Medical School and BIDMC. "Still, we didn't expect to see provider referral rates that were quite so high."

The results of the study appear in the May 9 issue of the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#).

Nerurkar and her colleagues collected information from more than 23,000 U.S. households from the 2007 National [Health Interview Survey](#). They found that nearly 3 percent (representing more than 6.3 million Americans) used MBT due to provider referral and that these Americans were sicker and used the health care system more than people who self-

referred for MBT.

"What we learned suggests that providers are referring their patients for mind-body therapies as a last resort once conventional therapeutic options have failed. It makes us wonder whether referring patients for these therapies earlier in the treatment process could lead to less use of the [health care system](#), and possibly, better outcomes for these [patients](#)," said Nerurkar.

"These data suggest that [mind-body therapies](#) have really become a mainstream approach to care," adds Russell Phillips, MD, Chief of Primary Care at BIDMC and the senior author on the study. "But more research is needed to guide physician and patient decision-making regarding their use."

Provided by Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Citation: Health-care providers are prescribing nontraditional medicine (2011, May 9) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-05-health-care-nontraditional-medicine.html>

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