

Complementary and alternative therapy improved lives of arthritis patients

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Nearly a quarter of patients with rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis used complementary and alternative therapy (CAT) to help manage their condition, according to a study in the November issue of the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*.

Researchers interviewed 250 patients aged between 20 and 90 years of age. More than two-thirds (67%) had [rheumatoid arthritis](#) and the remainder had osteoarthritis.

They found that 23% used CAT in addition to prescribed drugs and that just under two-thirds of those (64%) felt that the therapy was beneficial, reporting improvements in pain intensity, sleeping patterns and activity levels.

"Our study underlines the importance of healthcare professionals being knowledgeable about the potential use of CAT when providing medical care to patients with arthritis" says lead author Professor Nada Alaaeddine, Head of the Regenerative and Inflammation Lab in the Faculty of Medicine, University of St Joseph, Beirut, Lebanon.

"Although CAT might have beneficial effects in rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, patients should be cautious about their use and should tell their healthcare providers that they are using them to make sure they don't conflict with their existing treatment."

Key findings of the survey included:

- CAT users had an average age of 45 years, significantly younger than the average non CAT user, who was aged 57 years.
- CAT use was higher in patients with osteoarthritis (29%) than rheumatoid arthritis (20%).
- The most common CAT used was herbal therapy (83%), followed by exercise (22%), massage (12%), acupuncture (3%), yoga and meditation (3%) and [dietary supplements](#) (3%).
- Just under a quarter of the patients using CAT (24%) sought medical care because of possible side effects, but they were not serious and were reversible. The most common side effects included skin problems (16%) and gastrointestinal problems (9%).
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- The majority did not tell their healthcare provider about their CAT use (59%).
- CAT users were asked to rate the amount of pain they felt and the percentage who said that they experienced no pain rose from 12% to 43% after CAT use. The number who slept all night rose from 9% to 66%.
- CAT users also reported an improvement in daily activities. The percentage who said that their pain did not limit them at all rose from 3% to 12% and the percentage who said they could do everything, but with pain, rose from 26% to 52%.

"CAT use is increasing and this study shows that it provided self-reported benefits for patient with rheumatoid arthritis and [osteoarthritis](#)" says Professor Alaaeddine.

"It is, however, important that patients discuss CAT use with their

healthcare practitioner and that they are made aware of possible side effects, in particular the possible interactions between herbal and prescribed drugs."

More information: *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 21, pp3198. (November 2012). [doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2012.04169.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2012.04169.x)

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