

Complementary and alternative medicine to remedy health problems

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An extensive study has charted the use of complementary and alternative medicine in Europe. It found that complementary and alternative medicine is being used in connection with various health problems, particularly in situations where conventional medical treatment is considered inadequate.

Headaches, back pain and other vexing conditions motivate people to seek alternative forms of treatment. The study revealed that women and more highly educated people use complementary and [alternative medicine](#) more often than others.

Research data were collected from more than 20 countries, with approximately 40,000 respondents participating in a study conducted in cooperation between the Universities of Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. The researchers examined four treatment types: traditional Asian treatments (Chinese [medicine](#), acupuncture, acupressure), alternative medicine (homeopathy, [herbal remedies](#)), manual therapies (massage, chiropractic, osteopathy, reflexology), and mind-body therapies (hypnosis and spiritual healing).

According to the findings, one in four subjects in the study population had used complementary and alternative treatments in the past year. The most commonly used forms of treatment were massage (12 percent), homeopathy (6 percent), osteopathy (5 percent) and herbal remedies (5 percent). Most subjects had experienced only one kind of treatment.

"We also found that alternative and complementary medicine was used primarily in a complementary manner, or together with conventional medicine. This should be kept in mind both in practical patient care and public discourse, where these treatments are often framed as an alternative to [conventional medicine](#)," says Teemu Kempainen, a researcher at the University of Helsinki.

Substantial differences between countries in treatment use

The prevalence of treatments varied greatly between the countries in the study. In Germany, nearly 40 percent of the study population had used complementary and alternative forms of treatment, whereas in Hungary, the corresponding share was 10 percent. In Finland and Estonia, 35 percent of respondents had used these forms of [treatment](#). "The differences are partly explained by the fact that in some countries, these treatments are covered by insurance. Some countries also train general practitioners in complementary medicine," says Kempainen.

The study concentrated on the use of complementary and alternative medicine in Europe. It was published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*. The study is based on European Social Survey data (Round 7), collected in 2014.

Provided by University of Helsinki

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