

Study explores perceptions of and preferences for complementary and integrative medicine options for chronic headache

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A new study from researchers with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Regenstrief Institute is one of the first to explore the perceptions and preferences of both patients and their healthcare providers regarding the use of complementary and integrative medicine treatments in conjunction with mainstream medicine for chronic headache.

"We found that veterans with [chronic headache](#) were very interested in combining alternatives, such as acupuncture, massage, yoga or tai chi, with mainstream medicine and that they were encouraged by the fact that alternatives exist to simply taking additional pharmaceuticals for pain," said study senior author Teresa Damush, Ph.D., research career scientist at with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) and research scientist at Regenstrief Institute. "While [healthcare providers](#) indicated a need to learn the scientific evidence for alternative therapies for chronic [headache](#), they supported patient empowerment and typically encouraged patients who articulated an interest in alternative therapies.

"What we have learned from this study, which used semi-structured interviews to learn from stakeholders, is generalizable to other healthcare systems and settings, advancing understanding of how to improve the way we care for patients with chronic headache," she said.

Dr. Damush is a research [health](#) psychologist and implementation scientist specializing in the design, implementation and evaluation of patient-centered programs in both primary and specialty care practices that empower the patient to modify controllable factors that may improve health-related quality of life.

Complementary medicine is the use of non-mainstream medical approaches together with conventional medical care. Integrative health combines conventional and complementary medicine in a coordinated manner.

Migraines affect one out of seven adults in the U.S. Approximately 12 percent of veterans, especially those who have been in combat, have a history of traumatic brain injury, or have been exposed to burn pits, may experience severe headaches impacting their quality of life and ability to function.

The researchers interviewed veterans and their healthcare providers at a dozen VA medical centers with a Headache Center of Excellence. National Director of the Headache Centers of Excellence program Jason Sico, M.D., a co-author, said, "one thing we have learned through Dr. Damush and the team's paper is that complementary and integrative medicine approaches clearly resonates with [veteran](#)'s values and preferences."

"Complementary and integrative medicine perspectives among veteran patients and VHA healthcare providers for the treatment of headache disorders: a qualitative study" is published in the peer-reviewed open access journal *BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies*.

More information: Deena E. Kuruvilla et al, Complementary and integrative medicine perspectives among veteran patients and VHA healthcare providers for the treatment of headache disorders: a qualitative study, *BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12906-022-03511-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-022-03511-6)

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