

Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Managing Arthritis

A study was recently completed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that provides detailed information about the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for symptoms associated with arthritis. Previously studies had suggested that people with arthritis have high rates of using CAM, however there was little known regarding the most common forms of CAM utilized and use by demographics and disease state. Participants were patients followed in primary care and specialty care clinics in North Carolina.

Ninety percent (90.5%) of participants from specialty clinics and 82.8% from primary care clinics had tried at least 1 form of complementary therapy for arthritis symptoms, with ointments and topical rubs being the most commonly used CAM. Interestingly, the current rates for ointments and topical rubs were much lower suggesting that these methods were commonly tried, but were not currently used as often. Spiritual methods such as prayer or attending religious services were the second most commonly used CAM with 40% - 49% of participants having ever used them. The least commonly used CAM was special diets (7% - 16%) for both groups of participants.

Participants with Fibromyalgia (FM) used CAM therapies significantly more often than did those participants with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), Osteoarthritis (OA) or Chronic Joint Symptoms (CJP). Women used most categories of CAM more often than men and higher levels of education were positively associated with 5 categories of CAM use and negatively associated with current use of ointments or topical rubs. Participants from the specialty setting used CAM more often than those from the primary care setting, which is not surprising since these patients have more severe disease and are perhaps in greater need of pain relief.

This study indicated that while participants tried a variety of CAM therapies, ever and current use of certain therapies were not always similar. Though patients had tried rubs, alternative providers and body treatments, they often were not currently using these methods. On the other hand, ever and current use of special diets, spiritual methods and mind-body therapies were similar, which may suggest that people with arthritis are more satisfied with certain forms of CAM than others.

With the finding that almost all participants in the study used CAM at some point for his/her arthritis symptoms, it would be useful for practitioners and healthcare providers to invite discussion of the use of CAM to assist patients in evaluating

risks and benefits. This would also allow for coordination of treatment efforts and sharing of information between patient and provider.

Full Article:

Callahan, LF, Wiley-Exley ED, Mielenz TJ, Brady TJ, Xiao C, Currey SS, et al. Use of complimentary and alternative medicine among patients with arthritis. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2009;6(2). http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2009/apr/08_0070.htm.