

# Introduction to Holistic Health



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## Introduction

You may have heard the term “holistic health.” Along with it, you may have heard of “alternative medicine,” “complementary medicine” and “integrative medicine.” What do these terms mean? How do they differ from mainstream health care? Do these treatments work to prevent and treat illness?

Holistic health focuses on treating the whole person — mind, body and spirit. Unlike Western medicine, which focuses on treating the symptoms a patient experiences, holistic medicine attempts to discern the underlying causes for an ailment. Often those are related to harmonic imbalances that affect the mind and spirit, as well as the body. Holistic health aims to restore these imbalances to restore and maximize harmony in the patient.

Like conventional Western medicine, holistic medicine aims to prevent and treat disease, but there is also a significant focus on achieving optimal health and wellbeing. Holistic health is a lifestyle, not just something to use when you don’t feel well.

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## Alternative and integrative medicine

When people use the term “alternative medicine,” it’s usually in reference to modalities, or types, of medical treatments that aren’t considered mainstream. That could include acupuncture, moxibustion, herbal medicine, yoga, meditation and more.

Integrative medicine incorporates both Eastern and Western modalities, and also focuses on the whole person. Many people in the U.S. take the integrative approach, using holistic and Western treatments as part of their health care plan.

## Holistic medicine: An ancient tradition

Holistic medicine is part of an ancient tradition of health care that dates back thousands of years. For example, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which is also called Oriental medicine, is a 4,000-year-old practice based on Taoist principles and widely used in Asia.

In addition, more peer-reviewed medical studies show the effectiveness of alternative medicine modalities — such as massage, acupuncture and herbal remedies — for the treatment of a broad range of health conditions. More hospitals are offering holistic treatments, and a growing number of Americans are spending their health care dollars on alternative and complementary medicine.

This book will explore some of the most common practices in holistic health, how to pursue a career in holistic health and what daily life as a holistic health practitioner is like.

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## 1. Holistic Health Practices

One way to learn more about holistic health is to explore some of the specific types of practices. Like the specialties of conventional medicine, holistic medicine has a variety of different practices, techniques and modalities.

Many practices in holistic medicine rely on a concept called **qi** — pronounced “chee” — that represents the body's life force energy. Qi flows through channels of the body called meridians. Disruptions in this flow can cause imbalances in a patient that manifest as health problems.

Many of the practices discussed below aim to restore balance and harmony in the body by alleviating blockages of qi flow along the meridians. The following is by no means an exhaustive list or overview of holistic health practices, but covers a cross-section and serves as a good introduction to holistic medicine in practice.

### 13 common holistic health practices

**Acupuncture:** A technique used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), or Oriental medicine, that involves inserting thin needles in specific points on the meridians to help resolve blockages in the flow of a patient's qi and restore harmonious balance.

**Moxibustion:** Another TCM practice that aims to stimulate the flow of qi and facilitate healing through the burning an herb called **mugwort** on acupuncture points.

**Herbal medicine:** An ancient tradition of using herbs from a plant — such as roots, leaves, seeds, berries, bark or flowers — to prevent and treat illness or improve health.

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**Asian bodywork:** Therapies focused on treating the energetic or electromagnetic fields around a patient using pressure or manipulation to treat the mind, body and spirit.

**Shiatsu:** A type of massage developed by a Buddhist monk in Japan in the 6th century that literally means *finger pressure* and targets specific points on the body to improve the flow of qi along the meridians.

**Medical massage:** Using massage to resolve health issues as part of a diagnosis and treatment plan prescribed by a physician.

**Swedish massage:** A popular type of massage in the United States that involves manipulating the muscles in long, gliding strokes, and using kneading, tapping, stretching and circular pressure to improve blood flow.

**Meditation:** An ancient mind body practice that involves achieving a thoughtful awareness and peace, often done in a distraction-free setting while sitting in a comfortable posture, in order to improve general wellbeing.

**Tai Qi:** Also called **tai chi** or **tai chi chuan**, this is a gentle form of exercise featuring graceful and flowing movements that promote a meditative state among those who practice.

**Qi gong:** Also called **qigong** or **chi kung**, this ancient Chinese practice involves using physical postures and breathing techniques and focused intentions to increase energy and vitality.

**Reiki:** A Japanese technique that uses the power of touch or *laying on of hands* to channel energy in order to activate the patient's own healing powers and restore physical and emotional wellbeing.

**Energy healing:** Holistic health practices that manipulate the body's energy to improve a person's physical, mental and spiritual well being.

**Injection therapy:** A technique that involves injecting natural homeopathic substances, such as herbs or vitamins, beneath the skin or muscle to treat a range of physical ailments.



## 2. Path to a Holistic Health Career

Do you have the desire to go to work and help people each day? If the answer is yes, you have the number one requirement down for working in holistic medicine. You might think: *"Plenty of professions involve helping people."* That's true. You could get a job in any field from teaching to customer service. What sets holistic medicine apart is that it involves the process of working with people using natural methods and approaches rooted in ancient practices that take the whole person into account — mind, body and spirit.

In addition to helping people, there are many other qualities that make a career in holistic health challenging, appealing and rewarding. But first you might ask: *"What does it take to make a good holistic health practitioner besides just wanting to help people? Am I cut out for it?"*

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## The traits that make a great holistic health professional

If you have some of the following qualities, a holistic health career might be a great fit. Are you:

- Compassionate
- Supportive
- Detail-oriented
- Dedicated to healing and helping others
- A good listener and communicator
- Ethical

Granted, these qualities will probably make you an asset in any workplace — but they'll really help you excel in holistic health. Your patients will come to you seeking an empathetic partner in their journeys toward better health and overall wellness. Many will be looking for the kind of care they can't find in traditional mainstream medicine. You'll be working intimately with people on a daily basis. If that idea energizes you, holistic health is a great avenue to explore

Additional skills that would help you on the path to becoming a holistic health practitioner include:

- Critical thinking
- Decision-making abilities
- Problem-solving
- Time management
- Communication

Whether you run your own practice or work in a spa, medical or other setting, holistic health involves assessing other people's problems and understanding their symptoms in order to identify and treat the underlying causes of their illnesses.



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## Experience required for a career in holistic health

The background requirements and training required by an educational program for holistic health discipline vary, depending on what you want the focus of your practice to be. For example, to enter a [master's degree program in Oriental Medicine](#) can require a minimum of 60 college credits to start, and take 36 months to complete.

Other disciplines may not require a specific level of college or schooling to enter. Training, certification and degree programs vary. For example, to become a certified teacher of tai chi or qi gong, it typically takes about 150 hours. Many students of these practices become teachers by first serving as assistants to their own instructors.

[A massage therapy program](#) could take as little as 8.5 months to complete, or 9.5 months for students attending only in the evenings. Many holistic health education programs offer options for students who can only attend part-time due to family, other employment or additional constraints.

Another option is obtaining an [associate's of arts degree in health and science](#), which takes 19.25 months to complete. Talk to the admissions department or administration of any school or program you're considering.





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## What to look for in a holistic health education

If you do decide to pursue a training program in a holistic health discipline, what should you look for?

In some fields, there may be some standardization in curriculum, but there will also be differences. You want to make sure the program you're considering will be a good fit for your needs and desires.

Schools of Oriental medicine or massage therapy, for example, may have different guiding philosophies or approaches to their curricula. A program will often focus on or be a blend of the following traditions:

- Chinese
- Japanese
- Five Element
- Korean
- Japanese

Massage schools might emphasize a specific technique, such as shiatsu or Swedish massage. Ask yourself the following questions with regards to selecting a program:

- Does this school offer the specialization I am looking for?
- How long is the program?
- When are classes offered and do they fit my schedule?
- What is the student to faculty ratio?
- Is the school accredited by the appropriate institutions?
- Is financial aid available to help meet any expenses I can't cover?
- Does this program offer job placement resources?

The journey of pursuing a holistic health degree or certificate can be just as rewarding as the completion of the program. Expect training as a holistic health professional to be challenging, as well as gratifying. You'll likely learn a lot about complex topics, such as anatomy and physiology. Sometimes hands-on and clinical training is required.

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## Steps to take after completing a degree

Upon graduation, you may have to take licensure or certification exams in order to practice. A great educational program will help you prepare for any tests required. Quality schools will also offer resources to help place graduates in jobs in their field, especially for specialties like massage therapy and Oriental medicine.

Fortunately, the demand for holistic health practitioners is growing. Each year, Americans spend \$30 billion on complementary and alternative medicine. That amounts to 59 million people, spending about \$500 annually each.

Much of that spending is on services — like acupuncture and massage — but also products like herbal medicine. Another impressive statistic: Employment in massage therapy is expected to grow 22 percent from 2014 to 2044, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

More people are beginning to understand the connection between the mind, body and spirit in terms of health and wellness. The outlook in growth for holistic health professionals is promising.



## 3. Life as a Holistic Health Practitioner

What your day-to-day life looks like as a holistic health practitioner will be unique, depending on your specialty or the environment in which you choose to work.

Many graduates of holistic medicine programs open their own private practices, but they might also work at a wellness center with other practitioners of the same or other natural health disciplines.

Some hospitals now also include holistic treatments among their offerings, and many businesses have wellness programs that give their employees access to massage therapy, yoga classes or meditation sessions during the work day.

Oriental medicine graduates, for example, typically work in an established clinic or their own private practice. Massage therapy graduates often work in spas, resorts, cruise ships, hotels or private practices.

No matter your specialty or where you work, you'll have the satisfaction of being able to help and heal others, all while pursuing your own life goals. These are some of the other main reasons people enjoy careers in holistic health:

- Flexibility in scheduling
- Growth in demand in the field, which equates to financial security
- Rewarding option for a second career, with evening and part-time training options
- Active work life that focuses on health
- Opportunities to run your own business

Most people who pursue holistic health careers appreciate the fact that they have autonomy in their scheduling, and a variety of work environments to choose from. You could spend part of your day on a corporate campus offering massages, and another part in a resort spa setting.

However, the majority of massage therapists — 67 percent — are sole practitioners, according to the American Massage Therapy Association. With any discipline in holistic health, opening your own practice is always an option. That makes it a great field for people who have an entrepreneurial spirit or long for the satisfaction of running their own business.

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## Conclusion

Holistic health offers challenging and rewarding career options. Not only do you get to work with patients to help solve their health problems and improve their general well being but you get to do it in a way that honors and respects the whole person, mind body and spirit.

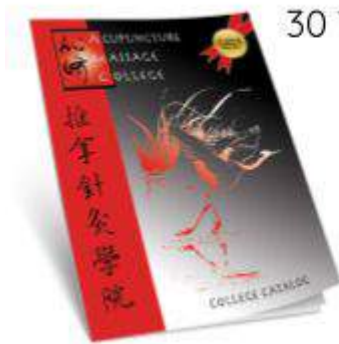
Part of an ancient system of care, holistic health encompasses many modalities of treatment, including massage, acupuncture, meditation, qi gong and reiki. Different specialities require unique backgrounds and training, but all require qualities like empathy, compassion and communication skills.

Many practitioners love the flexibility in schedule and work environment that holistic health jobs tend to have. If you go this route, you'll also love opportunities for truly becoming independent in your work life — even running your own practice, if that's what you so desire. Most of all, though, you'll love the fact that holistic health allows you to help people every day through your work.

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Nationally accredited Acupuncture and Massage College offers several massage therapy degree programs in Traditional Chinese Massage, Swedish Massage, Medical Massage, and Sports Massage. Each program can be **completed in less than a year** and provides the knowledge and experience to apply for state licensure and begin an exciting new career as a massage therapist.

Interested in learning more? Acupuncture and Massage College is an accredited college in Miami with multiple program starting throughout the year. [Contact our admissions department](#) at (305) 595-9500. You can also [Learn more about the AM College programs on our website](#).



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