



Approaches to Health



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Your health isn't a static condition; rather, it's a continuum that starts when you are born and changes over time. As your health needs shift, you may find that the ways in which you support them do, too.

For instance, if you experience an acute health concern, such as a broken arm, you may need surgery to repair the injury. If you're managing chronic pain symptoms, you may visit an acupuncturist regularly in addition to taking prescribed medications. And if you begin to experience digestive issues, you may decide to meet with a nutritionist to guide you in making therapeutic shifts to your diet.

There are several well-known healthcare approaches, including:

- Conventional medicine
- Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)
- Integrative medicine
- Functional medicine

At IIN, we believe these health modalities – and others – work together to support holistic well-being.

Read on to explore each of these approaches in more detail.

CONVENTIONAL MEDICINE

- Conventional medicine specializes in acute, emergency, intensive, and urgent care.
- It uses conventional modalities, such as surgery or prescription medications, for symptom treatment and prevention.
- It's an organ-system model of disease, where the body is often seen and treated as separate parts.
- The practitioner is typically viewed as the authority in the treatment process.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM)

- CAM consists of therapies that may be classified by primary therapeutic input, such as nutritional, physical, or psychological.¹ It may include healing philosophies, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), homeopathy, naturopathy, and Ayurveda, and a blend of therapeutic inputs are often used.
- Nutritional therapies may include therapeutic diets, dietary supplements, and herbs.
- Physical therapies may include chiropractic care, acupuncture, and massage.
- Psychological therapies may include meditation, hypnosis, aromatherapy, and biofeedback.

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

- Integrative medicine evolved to blend CAM therapies into the conventional healthcare model and employs a variety of CAM healing therapies alongside conventional modalities (when necessary).²
- It aims to use natural, less invasive, and less expensive methods of treatment first.
- It emphasizes optimal healing and vitality, not merely the absence of disease.
- Integrative medicine adopts a holistic approach.

FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE

- Functional medicine provides an upstream approach to healthcare that seeks to uncover the root causes of symptoms and disease.
- It considers the unique individual by examining biochemical individuality and exploring the predisposing factors (e.g., genetics), triggers, and mediators of disease.³
- Functional medicine values the importance of personalized treatment plans created through a partnership between the patient and their provider.
- It views organ systems as interconnected and adopts a holistic approach to create a healing environment that restores vitality, not merely the absence of disease.

This guide is not a comprehensive list of every health approach. It serves as a starting point for considering and understanding several health approaches available. There are many approaches around the world that you can explore, and depending on your circumstances, including your culture and location, some may be more accessible than others.

There isn't one pathway to optimal health, and for this reason, it's important to tune in to your body and your needs to choose the healthcare approaches that align with wherever you are in your health journey.

FOOTNOTES

- 1| National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. (2021). *Complementary, alternative, or integrative health: What's in a name?* Retrieved from nccih.nih.gov/health/complementary-alternative-or-integrative-health-whats-in-a-name
- 2| Raket, D. (2018). *Integrative medicine* (4th ed.). Elsevier.
- 3| Noland, D., Drisko, J. A., & Wagner, L. (Eds). (2020). *Integrative and functional medical nutrition therapy*. Springer Press. Retrieved from doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30730-1