

# “Types of Alternative Medicine: What They Do and How to Choose”

By UnconventionallyWise.com

There are many types of alternative medicine, from practices focused on energy balance to those rooted in physical manipulation or preventive care. This guide outlines the most common types of alternative medicine practitioners, what they offer, and how to choose the right one for your needs.

## Integrative Medicine Doctors (MDs or DOs)

These are fully licensed medical doctors who combine standard treatments with evidence-based alternative therapies.

- **Credentials:** MD or DO with additional certification in integrative care (MD stands for Medical Doctor; DO stands for Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, a fully licensed physician with training in musculoskeletal techniques and a whole-body approach to care)
- **Methods:** Nutrition, supplements, acupuncture, lifestyle changes, stress management
- **Insurance:** Often accepted
- **Best for:** People who want holistic options alongside conventional medical care

## Functional Medicine Doctors, Practitioners

Functional medicine includes a wide range of personalized approaches aimed at identifying and addressing the root causes of chronic illness. It uses a systems-based model that looks at how different body systems interact, often going beyond conventional diagnostics.

- **Credentials:** MDs, DOs, chiropractors, or nurse practitioners with additional training in functional medicine
- **Methods:** Lab testing (hormones, microbiome, food sensitivities, genetics), detox plans, nutrition, lifestyle interventions, and in some cases, epigenetic analysis to better understand how environment and habits influence gene expression
- **Insurance:** Often not covered
- **Best for:** People with chronic symptoms or complex health issues who want a deeper understanding of their biology and a long-term, tailored plan

## Chiropractors (DCs)

Chiropractors focus on spinal alignment and neuromuscular health. Some expand into lifestyle and nutritional counseling.

- **Credentials:** Doctor of Chiropractic (DC)
- **Methods:** Spinal adjustments, muscle release, posture therapy
- **Insurance:** Often covered
- **Best for:** Back and neck pain, posture, headaches, nerve compression

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## Naturopathic Doctors (NDs)

Naturopaths combine herbal medicine, nutrition, and preventive care. They receive medical training but are not MDs.

- **Credentials:** ND from an accredited naturopathic medical school
- **Methods:** Herbs, supplements, dietary changes, detox, lifestyle counseling
- **Insurance:** Varies by state and provider
- **Best for:** Prevention, chronic illness, non-pharmaceutical support

## Unlicensed Naturopaths and Wellness Coaches

These practitioners often offer guidance on supplements and lifestyle but are not medically trained.

- **Credentials:** Vary; may be certified as wellness coaches or herbalists
- **Methods:** Lifestyle tips, herbs, non-clinical health advice
- **Insurance:** Not accepted
- **Best for:** Basic wellness support and general health goals

## Holistic Health Coaches and Energy Practitioners

This group includes non-medical professionals who support emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

- **Examples:** Yoga teachers, meditation coaches, Reiki healers, herbalists
- **Methods:** Energy work, breathwork, plant medicine
- **Insurance:** Not accepted
- **Best for:** Stress, sleep, life transitions, emotional regulation

## Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), sometimes simply referred to as Chinese medicine, includes acupuncture, herbal formulas, cupping, tai chi, and other practices focused on restoring internal balance.

- **Credentials:** L.Ac. or TCM certification
- **Methods:** Needle therapy, herbal formulas, bodywork
- **Insurance:** Sometimes covered
- **Best for:** Chronic pain, hormonal issues, sleep, digestion

## Ayurvedic Practitioners

Ayurveda is an ancient Indian healing system that uses herbs, food, and daily rituals to bring balance to the body's doshas (energetic types).

- **Credentials:** Certified in Ayurvedic medicine (not always licensed in the U.S.)
- **Methods:** Body typing, herbal formulas, oils, detox (panchakarma), breathwork
- **Insurance:** Not accepted
- **Best for:** Stress, digestion, fatigue, prevention

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## Red Flags to Watch For

Avoid practitioners who:

- Promise instant or miracle cures
- Dismiss conventional medicine entirely
- Refuse to explain their qualifications or treatment plans
- Pressure you to buy expensive supplements or packages

## Questions to Ask Before Starting Treatment

### Training and Safety

- Are you licensed or certified in your field?
- Do you have experience with my specific issue?

### Treatment Approach

- What methods do you use and why?
- How long before I may see results?

### Costs and Communication

- Are your services covered by insurance?
- Will you collaborate with my other doctors?
- Do you offer clear pricing or package options?

## How to Choose the Right Alternative Medicine Practitioner

- Start with a one-time consult
- Ask if they'll work with your primary doctor
- Check how responsive their office is
- Make sure pricing and expectations are clear
- Ask for referrals and read reviews, but trust your gut

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