



## Effectiveness of Integrative Medicine Approaches in the Treatment of Substance Use Disorders

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### Introduction

Substance use disorders (SUDs) continue to be a significant public health concern, affecting millions of individuals worldwide. These disorders are characterized by a compulsive pattern of substance use despite harmful consequences, and often result in physical, psychological [1], and social impairments. Traditional treatment approaches for SUDs include behavioral therapies, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and contingency management, along with pharmacological treatments like methadone or buprenorphine for opioid dependence and disulfiram for alcohol use disorder. However, despite the benefits of these conventional treatments, many individuals with SUDs struggle with relapse and long-term recovery. In recent years, integrative medicine approaches have gained traction as a complementary or alternative treatment for SUDs. These approaches focus on treating the whole person, not just the addiction, and often include therapies such as acupuncture, yoga, mindfulness meditation, nutritional interventions, and herbal medicine [2]. By addressing the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of recovery, integrative medicine aims to provide more comprehensive and individualized care, fostering long-term sobriety and overall well-being. This article assesses the effectiveness of integrative medicine approaches in the treatment of SUDs, with a focus on the most commonly used therapies in clinical practice.

### Integrative Medicine: A Holistic Approach to Substance Use Disorders

Integrative medicine differs from conventional medical treatments by emphasizing the importance of the therapeutic relationship between the patient and healthcare provider [3], and by integrating complementary therapies into standard care. This approach recognizes the mind-body connection and encourages a holistic perspective on health, addressing not only the addiction itself but also the underlying factors that contribute to the development and perpetuation of substance use. Integrative medicine practitioners may use a variety of non-pharmacological therapies, often in combination with traditional medical treatments, to help individuals manage cravings, reduce withdrawal symptoms, and improve mental health outcomes during recovery [4].

### Key Integrative Therapies in the Treatment of Substance Use Disorders

#### Acupuncture

Acupuncture, a key component of traditional Chinese medicine, involves inserting thin needles into specific points on the body to stimulate energy flow and restore balance. Research has suggested that acupuncture can be effective in treating withdrawal symptoms, reducing cravings, and managing stress and anxiety, all of which are common challenges faced by individuals in recovery from SUDs. Studies have shown that acupuncture may help regulate neurotransmitters [5], such as dopamine and serotonin, which play key roles in mood and addiction. While more rigorous clinical trials are needed, acupuncture

is considered a valuable adjunctive therapy for individuals undergoing detoxification or in recovery.

#### Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness-based interventions, such as mindfulness meditation and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), focus on cultivating present-moment awareness and acceptance of one's thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness can reduce the risk of relapse in individuals with SUDs by promoting self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a non-reactive state of mind. Mindfulness meditation has been found to help individuals manage cravings and negative emotions that may trigger substance use. Additionally, mindfulness practices may improve mental health outcomes by reducing anxiety, depression, and stress, all of which are common co-occurring issues in addiction [6].

#### Yoga

Yoga is a mind-body practice that combines physical postures, breathing exercises, and meditation. Yoga has been shown to improve mental health by reducing stress and anxiety, promoting relaxation, and enhancing emotional regulation. In the context of addiction recovery, yoga has been found to reduce cravings, improve self-awareness, and promote a sense of well-being. Studies have suggested that yoga may help individuals with SUDs manage stress, a major risk factor for relapse, while also addressing physical symptoms related to withdrawal. The calming effects of yoga may also help individuals re-establish a sense of bodily awareness and reconnect with their physical and emotional selves, which is often disrupted during active addiction.

#### Nutritional Interventions

Proper nutrition is critical for individuals in recovery from SUDs, as substance abuse often leads to nutrient deficiencies and physical imbalances. Integrative medicine recognizes the importance of a healthy diet in supporting the body's healing process during recovery. Nutritional interventions may include supplementation with vitamins and minerals, the use of detoxifying foods, and promoting a balanced, nutrient-dense diet to support brain function and emotional stability. Specific nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins, and magnesium, have been shown to support cognitive function, reduce

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anxiety, and improve mood, all of which are essential for long-term recovery. Additionally, dietary changes can help individuals rebuild their physical health and promote a sense of vitality during the recovery process.

### Herbal Medicine

Herbal treatments, such as the use of St. John's Wort, valerian root, and kava, are commonly used in integrative medicine to manage symptoms of anxiety, depression, and insomnia, all of which are prevalent among individuals with SUDs. While the evidence for the efficacy of herbal treatments is mixed, certain herbs may offer adjunctive support in managing psychological symptoms and promoting emotional well-being. For example, St. John's Wort has been studied for its potential to improve mood and reduce depressive symptoms, while valerian root has been used to promote relaxation and reduce anxiety. However, individuals should consult with healthcare providers before using herbal supplements, as they may interact with other medications or have side effects.

### The Evidence for Integrative Medicine in Substance Use Disorder Treatment

While research on the effectiveness of integrative medicine approaches in treating SUDs is still emerging, there is growing evidence to suggest that these therapies can complement traditional treatments and improve recovery outcomes. Studies have found that mindfulness-based interventions, such as mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP), significantly reduce the risk of relapse and promote emotional regulation in individuals recovering from alcohol and drug addiction. Similarly, acupuncture has shown promise in reducing withdrawal symptoms and cravings, particularly in individuals recovering from opioid and alcohol dependence. Yoga and meditation have also been shown to improve mood, reduce stress, and promote a sense of self-awareness and emotional balance, which are critical for individuals managing addiction. Furthermore, nutritional interventions and herbal medicine are increasingly being recognized as valuable tools in supporting the physical and psychological aspects of recovery. However, it is important to note that while integrative medicine approaches can be beneficial, they are most effective when used in conjunction

with evidence-based treatments, such as psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy. Integrative therapies should be viewed as adjunctive rather than standalone treatments, offering individuals in recovery a holistic toolkit to address the multifaceted nature of addiction.

### Conclusion

Integrative medicine approaches provide valuable adjuncts to traditional treatments for substance use disorders, offering a holistic approach to recovery that addresses the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of addiction. Therapies such as acupuncture, mindfulness, yoga, nutritional interventions, and herbal medicine have shown promising results in reducing cravings, managing withdrawal symptoms, and promoting emotional regulation. While more rigorous clinical trials are needed to establish the effectiveness of these therapies, the evidence supporting their use in addiction recovery is growing. Integrative medicine offers a person-centered approach that considers the whole individual and encourages long-term recovery, making it an essential component of comprehensive treatment for substance use disorders. By integrating these therapies with conventional treatments, clinicians can help individuals achieve lasting sobriety and improve their overall quality of life.

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