

What's the Difference in Integrative and Conventional Medical Approaches to Healthcare?



A close look at two worlds of medicine

The practice of **Integrative Medicine** combines conventional primary care with other modalities of healing (popularly known as alternative medicine) to promote optimal health and to prevent and treat disease. The resulting effect is a synergy of the *art* and *science* of healing that addresses the whole person — body, mind and spirit.

Integrative Medicine recognizes that the outcome of all health care is strongly dependent upon four powerful influences in the lives of each person. These four pillars of healing are:

- **Relationship** — The social support network: family, friends, involvement in community, and a strong-patient alliance.
- **Diet and Lifestyle** — Nutrition, habits, and the daily pattern of rest and exercise.
- **A Healthy Environment** — Protection from chemical and biological toxins.
- **Detoxification** — The body's ability to self-purify and protect itself from internal toxicity.

Integrative Medicine allows you to find optimal health by understanding your *individual* needs for achieving balance and harmony.

A Comparison Table of Integrative Medicine approach to Conventional Primary Medicine approach

	Integrative Medicine	Conventional Primary Medicine
Philosophy	Based on the integration of allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO), naturopathic (ND), energy, and ethno-medicine.	Based on allopathic medicine.
Objective of Care	To promote optimal health and as a by-product, to prevent and treat disease.	To cure or mitigate disease and its symptoms.
Method of Care	Empower patients to heal themselves by addressing the causes of their disease and facilitating lifestyle changes through health promotion.	Focus on the elimination of physical symptoms.
Diagnosis	Evaluate the whole person through holistic medical history, holistic health score sheet, physical exam, lab data.	Evaluate the body with history, physical exam, lab data.
Treatment Options	Enhancing balance to the whole person - body, mind, and spirit with: nutrition, physical activity, environmental measures, attitudinal and behavioral modifications, relationship and spiritual counseling, energy enhancement.	Drugs and surgery
Supplemental Treatment Options	Botanical (herbal) medicine, homeopathy, acupuncture, manual medicine, supplements, physical therapy, drugs, and surgery.	Diet, exercise, physical therapy, and stress management.
Weaknesses	Shortage of integrative physicians and training programs; time-intensive, requiring a commitment to a healing process, not a quick-fix.	Ineffective in preventing and curing chronic disease; expensive.
Strengths	Teaches patients to take responsibility for their own health, and in so doing is: cost-effective in treating both acute and chronic illness; therapeutic in preventing and treating chronic disease; essential in creating optimal health.	Highly therapeutic in treating both acute and life-threatening illness and injuries.



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This article was adapted from material that Dr. Robert S. Ivker created during his term as president of the [American Holistic Medical Association](#) (1996 - 1999). It originally appeared in the Winter 1999 issue of "Holistic Medicine: The Journal of The American Holistic Medical Association."