[IMAGE]

Senior Use of CAM on the Rise

As more information about the benefits of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is published, more people are turning to CAM as a safe, natural form of healing. This is particularly true of the elderly population: Studies have consistently shown that nearly half of all adults over the age of 65 use some form of CAM on a regular basis, particularly to relieve pain or help stay fit.

The results of a study published in a recent issue of the *Journal of Gerontological Nursing* are typical of other surveys on CAM use in the elderly. In the study, 42 participants (average age: 77.9 years) completed a questionnaire on their use of and reasons for using CAM; some subjects also participated in an interview session.

Seventy-three percent of the participants reported using some form of CAM. Chiropractic was the most commonly used therapy among elderly patients (61.9 percent), followed by herbal medicine (54.8 percent), massage therapy (35.7 percent) and acupuncture (33.3 percent). Among the reasons for using CAM therapies, 54.8 percent used CAM for pain relief; 45.2 percent used CAM to improve quality of life; and 40.5 percent used CAM to maintain health and fitness.

These findings show that CAM use is alive and well in the elderly population. The authors of the study suggest increased education about CAM is needed for older adults and health professionals, and that CAM practitioners should try to understand why older people choose these therapies and play an active role in educating them about alternative forms of care.

Reference:

Williamson AT, Fletcher PC, Dawson KA. Complementary and alternative medicine. Use in an older population. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing* May 2003: Volume 29, Number 5, pp.20-28.

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