

# Alternative medicines more popular in U.S.

Top therapies are prayer, natural items, meditation

By DANIEL YEE  
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Alternative medicine — including yoga, meditation, herbs and the Atkins diet — appears to be growing in popularity in the United States, perhaps because of dissatisfaction with conventional care, the government said yesterday.

More than a third of American adults used such practices in 2002, according to the government survey of 31,000 people, the largest study on nonconventional medical approaches in the United States.

If prayer is included, about 62 percent of U.S. adults used some form of alternative medicine.

The results seem to indicate more people are turning to alternative medicine, though the 2002 survey could not be directly compared to previous studies because of differences in size and survey methods, health officials said.

The top alternative therapies included prayer (43 percent of adults), natural

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products (19 percent), meditation (8 percent) and diets such as Atkins, Ornish, or the Zone (4 percent).

More people also are using natural products such as herbs or enzymes to treat chronic or recurring pain, said Richard Nahin of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, part of the National Institutes of Health.

"Many conditions are not easily treated with conventional medicine," Nahin said. "It may be the public is turning to complementary and alternative medicine because it's not getting relief from conventional medicine."

But people should not be turning away from conventional treatments that are proven safe, said Dr. Stephen

## ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

According to a new nationwide survey, 36 percent of adults use some form of complementary and alternative medicine, or CAM.\*

### Why people use CAM

They believed that it would help when combined with conventional treatments



Recommended by conventional medical professional



It would be interesting to try



Conventional medicine was too expensive



\* When prayer for health reasons is included in the definition of CAM, the rate of Americans using CAM is 62 percent.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Straus, director of the alternative medicine center.

"People are making individual decisions to neglect those therapies and we have concerns about those choices," he said.

Health officials said they were concerned that 13 percent of those surveyed said they turned to alternative medicine because regular medicine is too expensive.

"It needs to be explored — we need to find out whether they were insured or

not," Nahin said.

Health officials also were surprised that 6.6 percent of those surveyed used the supplement kava kava, which has been associated with liver disease.

"People make the assumption that because something is natural that it's safe," Nahin said. "But a number of studies have shown that natural products can be unsafe when used inappropriately or with other drugs."

People considering using alternative medicine should consult their doctor.