

# Chronic Pain



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# Agenda

- Chronic pain overview
- CAM overview / Types
- Detailed CAM approaches
- Importance for nurses
- Ethical / Legal / Financial
- Care plan impact
- Case example
- Conclusion
- References

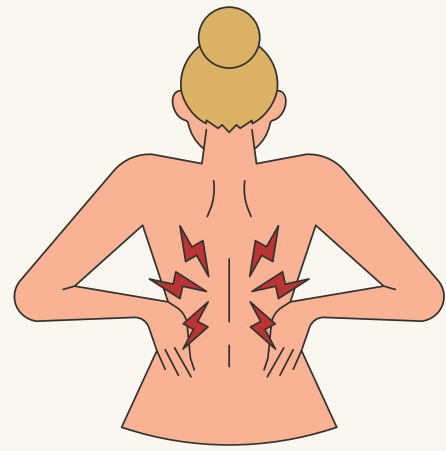
# Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is long-lasting or repeatedly occurring pain that continues for more than three to six months—long after an injury should have healed. It can interfere with daily activities, mood, and overall functioning. This type of pain may be linked to an ongoing condition, such as arthritis, or it may develop without an obvious cause, often due to changes in the nervous system that make pain signals stronger than usual.

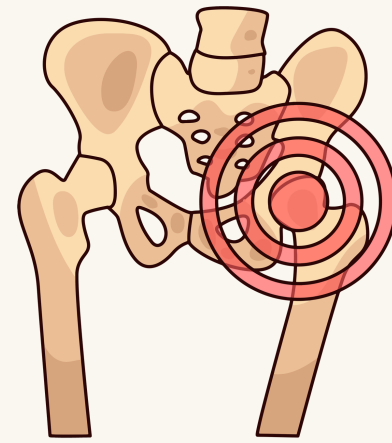


# Examples of Chronic Pain Conditions

**Chronic Low Back Pain**



**Osteoarthritis Pain**



**Chronic Migraine**



**Neuropathic Pain**



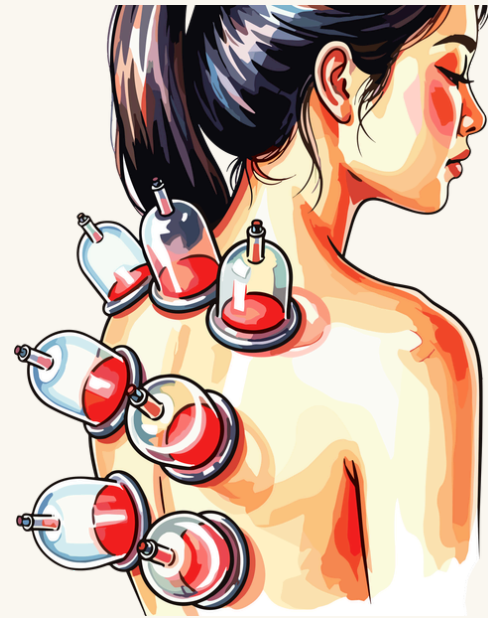
**Fibromyalgia**



**Postural-surgical or Post injury pain**



# Complementary Alternative Medicine



## Complementary & Alternative Medicine (CAM)

- Health practices outside conventional medicine
- Often combined into integrative health
- “Complementary” → used with medical care
- “Alternative” → used instead of medical care
- Includes:
  - Acupuncture
  - Massage
  - Yoga & tai chi
  - Mindfulness/meditation
  - Chiropractic care
  - Herbal or homeopathic products
- CAM is widely used for chronic pain

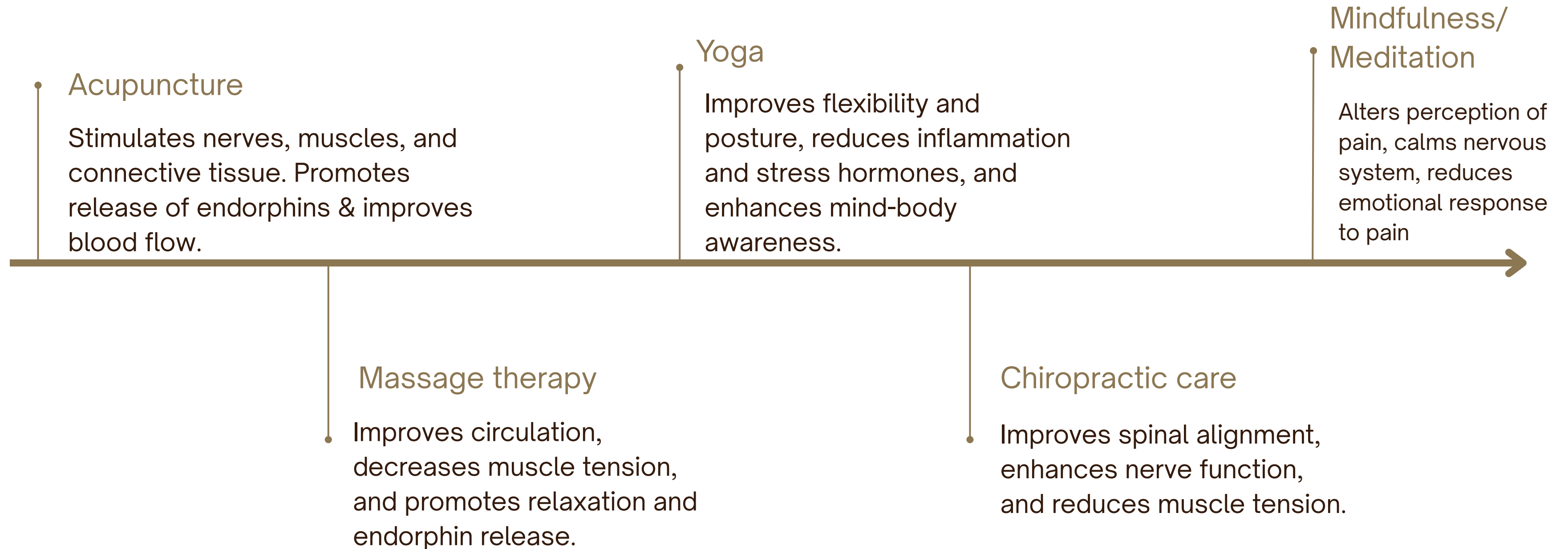
# Types of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Used for Chronic Pain



## Popular Approaches

- Acupuncture → *Insertion of thin needles into specific points on the body*
- Massage Therapy → *Manual manipulation of muscles and soft tissues*
- Yoga → *A mind-body practice combining movement, stretching, breathing, & meditation*
- Chiropractor Care → *Spinal manipulation and adjustment therapy*
- Mindfulness/Meditation → *Mental practices focused on awareness and stress regulation*
- Homeopathic Remedies → *Arnica, Rhus toxicodendron, Bryonia, Hypericum, Belladonna, Chamomilla*

# How Each Therapy Works





# Evidence-based benefits

## Acupuncture

- Shown to reduce low back pain, osteoarthritis, migraines, and fibromyalgia
- Recommended by WHO for multiple pain conditions

## Massage Therapy

- Effective for chronic low back pain, neck pain, and arthritis
- Reduces stress and improves sleep

## Yoga

- Improves pain and function in chronic low back pain and arthritis
- Reduces anxiety and depression related to chronic pain

## Chiropractic Care

- Strong evidence for acute and chronic low back pain
- Can improve neck pain and headaches

## Mindfulness/Meditation

- Reduces pain intensity and emotional distress
- Effective for fibromyalgia, migraines, and arthritis
- Improves coping and quality of life

# Safety considerations

## Acupuncture

- Must be performed by a licensed practitioner
- Risk of infection if not sterile
- Use caution in patients with bleeding disorders or on anticoagulants

## Massage Therapy

- Avoid over open wounds, burns, fractures, or blood clots
- Caution in patients with osteoporosis or cancer

## Yoga

- Risk of injury if poses are done incorrectly
- Modified poses needed for mobility limitations
- Should be guided by a trained instructor

## Chiropractic Care

- Rare risk of nerve or artery injury with neck manipulation
- Not recommended for patients with severe osteoporosis, fractures, or spinal instability

## Mindfulness/Meditation

- Some individuals may experience emotional discomfort initially



# Benefits of Integrating CAM into Care

## Reduces Reliance on Opioids

- Offers evidence-based nonpharmacologic options such as acupuncture, massage therapy, yoga etc.
- contributes to lowering opioid dosage requirements leading to a decrease in the risk of dependence, tolerance, and side effects.

## Improves Physical & Emotional Outcomes

- CAM therapies give patients the ability to move more comfortably by improving flexibility, mobility, and day-to-day functioning
- can reduce the emotional burden of chronic pain by alleviating anxiety, stress, and symptoms of depression.
- These benefits can make chronic pain feel more manageable and less overwhelming.

## Offers Personalized & Culturally Sensitive Care

- CAM gives patients the opportunity to choose therapies that align with their cultural or spiritual beliefs.
- Patient's individualized care plans can feel meaningful and supportive, thus increasing the likelihood of patient engagement and follow-through.

## Supports a Holistic Approach to Pain

- CAM addresses more than just physical symptoms, it can also target your mood, sleep, and overall spiritual well-being supporting individuals as a “whole person”.
- Ultimately, patients feel more balanced, supported, and in control of their pain experience.

# Why Healthcare Teams Must Understand CAM

## Patient Centered Care

- CAM is widely used by chronic pain patients. Many use acupuncture, massage, yoga, or supplements before reaching out to their health care provider.
- Understanding CAM allows nurses to align care with the patient's preferences, needs, and personal goals, which is the foundation of patient-centered care.

## Cultural Competence

- CAM therapies can come from cultural or spiritual traditions such as prayers or meditations.
- When nurses understand and respect these practices, it helps build trust and ensures care is culturally sensitive.
- It also prevents unintentionally dismissing a treatment that can be meaningful to a patient's identity.



# Why Healthcare Teams Must Understand CAM



## Nonpharmacologic Ways to Reduce Opioid Use:

- CAM therapies are recommended in many clinical guidelines to reduce reliance on opioids for chronic pain.
- Integrating CAM can help decrease opioid doses, reduce side effects, and lower risk of dependency.
- Examples include mindfulness, acupuncture, yoga, physical manipulation therapies.

## Building Therapeutic Relationships:

- As nurses, being open to discussing CAM allows patients to feel more heard and validated.
- This helps build rapport and encourages patients to share the CAM therapies they use, which can help improve safety measures and prevent harmful interactions.

# Ethical Issues in CAM for Chronic Pain

## Patient Autonomy

- Patients have the right to choose CAM therapies for managing chronic pain.

## Informed Consent

- Patients must understand risks, benefits, evidence level, and expected outcomes.

## Cultural & Spiritual Respect

- CAM practices often reflect cultural healing systems
- Care should honor patient beliefs.

## Avoiding Misinformation

- Prevent endorsement of unsafe, unproven, or exaggerated claims.

## Evidence-Based Practice

- Distinguish therapies with strong evidence (acupuncture, yoga, mindfulness, chiropractic) from those lacking support.

## Professional Boundaries

- Nurses cannot recommend CAM beyond their scope or promote unapproved products.

## Safety Considerations

- Screen for contraindications (e.g., bleeding risk with acupuncture, osteoporosis and manipulation).

# Legal & Regulatory Principles

## Legal & Regulatory Considerations

### Licensing Requirements

- Acupuncturists: State licensure + national exams
- Chiropractors: Licensed in all 50 states
- Massage Therapists: Training and certification vary by state

### Scope of Practice Regulations

- Each CAM provider must operate within legal limits of their profession.

### FDA Oversight of Supplements

- Supplements and homeopathic remedies lack pre-market FDA approval.
  - Purity and safety are not guaranteed.

### Hospital Credentialing

- Facilities regulate which CAM modalities may be offered and require credentialed practitioners.

### Documentation

- All CAM use must be recorded in the medical record to ensure safety, communication, and legal protection.

### Liability Concerns

- Incomplete assessment if CAM/supplement use is not identified.
- Risk if nurses recommend unregulated or ineffective CAM interventions.

# Financial / Economic Considerations

## Insurance Coverage Varies Widely

- Some plans cover acupuncture, chiropractic care, and massage therapy.
- Limits often exist on number of visits.

## Out-of-Pocket Costs

- Many CAM therapies require self-payment, creating barriers to access for low-income patients.

## Cost-Effectiveness

- CAM can lower healthcare expenses by reducing:
  - Opioid use and opioid-related complications
  - Emergency visits and primary care visits for pain
  - High-cost imaging (MRI, CT)
  - Need for invasive procedures or surgery

## Work & Functional Benefits

- CAM improves mobility and reduces missed workdays, improving economic productivity.

## Health Equity Concerns

- Uneven access may widen disparities; low-cost CAM options and insurance advocacy are important.

## Value-Based Care

- CAM supports preventive, holistic approaches aligned with long-term wellness and cost savings.

# Impact of CAM on Plan of Care for Chronic Pain Patients

- Expands treatment beyond medication alone
- Encourages holistic, whole person care
- Helps manage chronic pain long-term
- Supports physical + emotional well being
- Requires screening for safety & interactions
- Integrates easily with standard medical care
- Often improves patient engagement & adherence



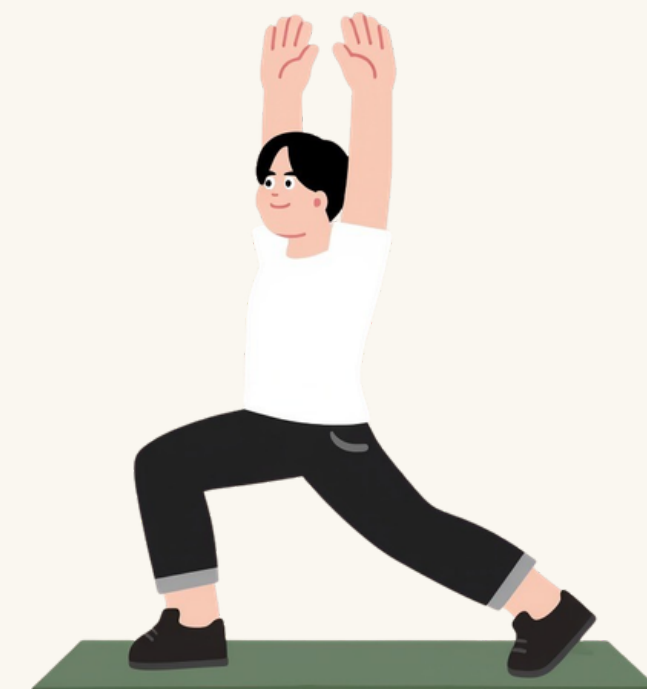
# Case Example: Chronic Low Back Pain

A 48 year old patient with chronic low back pain is looking for alternatives to long-term medication use. Their care plan includes a combination of yoga and stretching to increase mobility, acupuncture sessions to help reduce pain intensity, and massage therapy to relieve muscle tension.

The patient also uses heat therapy at home during flare-ups, along with simple mindfulness and breathing techniques for moments of increased stress or discomfort. Progress is evaluated regularly through pain scores, sleep patterns, and improvements in movement and daily activity. This type of plan shows how CAM can be blended with conventional care to support better outcomes.

## **Patient Plan Includes:**

- Yoga + Stretching: improves flexibility & core strength
- Acupuncture: decreases pain intensity
- Massage therapy: reduces muscle tension
- Heat therapy: at-home relief for flare-ups
- Mindfulness / Breathing: helps manage stress-related pain
- Progress checks: pain scores, sleep quality, mobility



# Population-Level Effects of CAM



CAM use in chronic pain has been shown to significantly reduce opioid prescriptions and misuse, giving patients access to safer, non-drug options. These therapies improve physical function and overall quality of life while also lowering long-term healthcare costs. Wider use of CAM is linked with fewer emergency room visits related to pain, higher patient satisfaction, and a greater emphasis on prevention and self-management rather than crisis-based care.

Key impacts include:

- Reduced opioid prescriptions and misuse, as patients rely more on non drug options
- Greater access to safe, low risk therapies like yoga, acupuncture, and mindfulness
- Improved physical function and overall quality of life
- Lower long-term healthcare costs due to fewer complications and better symptom control
- Fewer pain related ER visits, especially for chronic low back pain
- Higher patient satisfaction, with patients feeling more supported and in control
- Strong focus on prevention and self-management, not just symptom treatment

# Conclusion

CAM plays a valuable role in chronic pain management by expanding treatment choices, promoting holistic care, and supporting safer long-term outcomes. These approaches help patients manage pain more effectively, improve their daily functioning, and reduce reliance on medications. For nurses, understanding and integrating CAM allows for more comprehensive, patient-centered care plans that reflect each individual's needs, goals, and preferences. When combined with traditional medical treatment, CAM creates a more balanced and effective approach to chronic pain care.



- Encourages safer, non pharmacologic pain management
- Improves mobility, sleep, and overall daily functioning
- Enhances patient engagement and self-management
- Supports individualized, culturally sensitive care plans
- Reduces long term reliance on opioid medications
- Strengthens collaboration among interdisciplinary care teams

NUR 168: INTEGRATIVE THEORIES & PRACTICES

# The End

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