

Scientific proof of alternative medicine

Today's lesson is about an alternative kind of pain relief. Brainstorm possible cures for pain. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?

What would you do if you had the following things?

- Back pain/ Neck pain/ Shoulder pain
- Chronic headache
- Arthritis (pain in the joints - such as your hips, knees and knuckles - that is very common old people)
- Pain that your doctor can't find a cure for

Choose one of the alternative therapies/ complementary therapies below that you know about. Explain what it is and what you think about it (e.g. what it is and isn't useful for), then see if your partner agrees.

Acupuncture	Aromatherapy	Colonic irrigation
Colour therapy	Folk remedies (e.g. cures for colds that run in your family)	
Herbalism	Homeopathy	Juicing/ Detoxing
Laughter therapy	Meditation	Moxibustion
Reflexology	Shiatsu	Spiritual healing, e.g. reiki
Tai chi	Traditional Chinese medicine	Yoga

Useful language to talk about the alternative therapies above

Counterproductive	Data/ Evidence
Naïve	Non-prescription (= over the counter)
Placebo affect	Prescription
Psychosomatic	Randomised double blind controlled medical trials
Sham (= fake)	Side effect
Superstition	Western medicine

Ask your partner and then the class about any vocabulary above you don't understand (including the useful language box).

Which of these things are true about acupuncture, do you think?

- Acupuncture doesn't really help anyone
- There is no difference between acupuncture and a placebo
- There is an insignificant difference between acupuncture and a placebo
- There is a significant difference between acupuncture and a placebo
- What the therapist says is more important than how they place the needles
- It is impossible to design an experiment that really tests the efficacy of acupuncture

What do you predict the scientific opinions are?

Read the text (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/sep/10/acupuncture-useful-little-benefit-study>) and check. When different people have different views from above, write their names next to each line.

Do you disagree with any of the views in the text?

Would you expect similar or different results on the other alternative therapies you talked about before?

What do you think about the following things?

- Vitamin tablets for school kids
- Alternative exercises like yoga and tai chi in school PE lessons
- Doctors being able to supply placebo cures such as dummy pills to patients who they know have mainly psychological problems or in the place of anaesthesia
- Government funding for complementary therapies (= alternative medicine)
- Official licensing for alternative medicine practitioners and banning of the quacks (= charlatans)
- Training for conventional doctors on how to become more warm, friendly, sympathetic and reassuring (using physical contact, aromas etc.)

If you were a doctor, how would you solve this dilemma?

- Placebos have some positive effects and usually no negative side effects but most people consider doctors prescribing things that they know are just placebos to be unethical