



JAMES LAKE, M.D.

Integrative Mental Health Care

AN INTRODUCTION TO
FOUNDATIONS AND METHODS

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An introduction to foundations and methods

James Lake, MD

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This book is dedicated to my best friend and soul mate, Nicole Asselborn, MD, with gratitude for invaluable advice on the right scope and voice for this project, and for creating the lovely image on the cover.

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Disclaimer

The information provided in this book is intended as a concise summary of the principles and methods of integrative mental health care and does not constitute medical advice. The publisher and author are not responsible for any specific health needs that may require medical supervision and are not liable for any damages or negative consequences from any treatment, action or application to any person reading or using the information in this book. References to internet resources are provided for informational purposes only and do not constitute endorsement of any websites or other sources. Readers should be aware that the websites listed in this book may change.

Part I: What the books in this series are about and how they can help you

Why I wrote the books in this series

A growing number of psychiatrists, psychologists, family therapists, social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioners and other mental health professionals around the world believe that ***existing conventional treatment approaches such as prescription medications and psychotherapy do not adequately address the mental health needs of people everywhere.*** There are many reasons for this.

First of all, even though medications are often effective and safe, they are not available in many parts of the world and where they *are* available, they are often too expensive for many people to afford.

The potential value of medications for people afflicted with mental illness is also limited by the fact that many medications are no more effective than placebos and sometimes cause serious side effects. The limitations of medications have resulted in renewed interest in complementary and alternative (CAM) therapies, and efforts by mental health professionals, researchers and our patients to find more effective, safer and more affordable ways to treat mental health problems and to maintain optimal mental and emotional wellbeing.

Conventionally trained healthcare providers increasingly recommend a variety of *alternative* treatments in addition to medications for both medical and mental

health problems. Many alternative approaches have been used for centuries or longer for treating medical and mental health problems, in many cases with consistent reports of beneficial effects. Because of accumulating evidence for a variety of alternative approaches, in recent decades courses on 'traditional' healing approaches have been taught in medical schools, nursing schools and advanced seminars for psychiatrists and psychologists in the U.S., Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and in European countries.

What the books in this series cover

This book is offered as a brief introduction to essential concepts and methods of integrative mental healthcare. The other books in the [series](#) provide practical information on alternative treatments of common mental health problems, and strategies for using them in ways that are both safe and effective. Each book on a particular mental health problem covers the uses of herbals and other natural supplements, lifestyle changes such as exercise and nutrition, mind-body approaches, and energy therapies for treating that problem and maintaining optimal wellness. The series covers the following mental health problems:

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Anxiety
- Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

- Bipolar disorder
- Dementia and mild cognitive impairment (MCI)
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia

Concise summaries of alternative treatments covered in the books on specific mental health problems include the following information:

- Name and category of treatment
- How the treatment works (when known)
- Dosages (for natural supplements) or frequency of use (for whole-body, mind-body or energy modalities)
- Examples of safe and effective treatment combinations
- Comments about adverse effects and warnings pertaining to treatment combinations that may be unsafe and should be avoided
- Average duration of treatment needed to achieve beneficial results (when known)

All books in the series are organized in the same way and include the following sections:

- **Understanding the problem** This section will help you better understand your mental health problem whether you are struggling with alcohol or drug abuse, insomnia, depression or anxiety, or you have been diagnosed with ADHD, PTSD, bipolar disorder or dementia. In the first part of each book I review the causes and risk factors associated with the mental health problem being discussed. Typical symptoms of the mental health problem being covered are described together with medical or mental health problems that may occur together with that problem.
- **Taking inventory** In this section you will learn about the symptoms that make up your mental health problem. I've included links to standardized assessment tools you can use to help you determine whether your symptoms are mild, moderate or severe. Understanding your symptoms is important when deciding on a treatment plan that makes sense for you.
- **Identifying treatments that make sense for you: evaluating the evidence** In this section I review the evidence for specific alternative treatments. It is the largest and most important section of every book and provides

information you will need to identify appropriate treatments, decide on a treatment plan, or (if you are a therapist) provide information to a client.

Alternative treatments are presented starting with those supported by the highest level of evidence (i.e., for the specific mental health problem being discussed). I use a '3-tier' approach to rate treatments (see below). Under each tier treatments are listed alphabetically. I've included information on effective and safe dosages of natural supplements and comment on the evidence-based uses of exercise, nutrition, mind-body approaches and energetic therapies, with respect to the specific mental health problem being addressed. The information is summarized in easy-to-read bullets. Links permit you to quickly get to an alternative treatment that interests you and scan data on the mechanism of action, effectiveness, dosing, and comments on effective integrative treatment strategies (where known). This section also includes information on the duration of treatment typically needed to achieve consistent beneficial effects (when known). Safety information is provided to help you minimize the risk of adverse effects and avoid potentially dangerous interactions that are known to take place when specific supplements and medications are taken at the same time.

- **Deciding on a treatment plan that is *right for you*** This section discusses the steps needed to decide on an appropriate treatment plan taking into account your current symptoms and whether you have other mental health problems or a medical problem that may be making your mental health problem worse or interfering with response to treatment. Planning treatment that is custom-tailored to your needs is based on treatments you've previously tried, your personal preferences, resources that are available where you live, and financial considerations.

- **Making changes along the way: re-evaluating your treatment plan and making it better** This section will help you answer important questions such as:
 - How will I know if my current treatment plan is working?
 - What can I do about side effects?
 - How long should I wait before trying a new treatment if I'm not getting better?
 - Should I seek professional care?
 - When should I think about stopping my current treatment plan?

- **Repeating the steps until you find a treatment plan that works for you** If your first treatment plan has unsatisfactory results this section will guide you through steps to follow to develop a treatment plan that works better.
- **Summary of main points in the book** This section is a concise review of the most important concepts, information and methods in the book.
- **Going deeper** This section provides links to my other books and my website where you can find links to valuable internet resources and some of my journal publications and conference presentations.
- **Finding quality products and services** This section provides links to other internet resources on natural supplements and other alternative treatment approaches.

Alternative and integrative medicine defined

Alternative medicine—sometimes called ‘complementary and alternative medicine or CAM—consists of approaches that are currently not used in mainstream Western medicine (also called ‘biomedicine’ and ‘allopathic medicine’). Examples of CAM include acupuncture, herbs and other natural supplements, ‘energy’ therapies such as Healing Touch, Reiki and others.

Integrative medicine is a rapidly growing model of care that takes a middle approach between Western medicine as conventionally practiced and CAM.

Integrative medicine:

- is a person-centered approach
- that takes account of the needs and preferences of each unique person
- focuses on maintaining optimal health and treating symptoms
- uses both conventional mainstream approaches like medications and psychotherapy, and complementary and alternative (CAM) therapies like herbal medicines and acupuncture
- is based on the *best available* scientific evidence

Integrative mental health care defined

Integrative mental health care is a specialized area of integrative medicine aimed at helping each person find safe, appropriate and effective treatments for their mental health problem taking into account their unique symptoms, values, preferences and circumstances.

The conventional biomedical model of mental health care widely practiced in the U.S. and many other countries emphasizes the use of medications to treat

psychiatric *disorders*. In contrast, integrative mental healthcare is concerned with maintaining optimal wellness and *managing each person's symptoms* in the context of their unique values, preferences and circumstances. Medications will probably continue to play an important role in mental health care—especially for managing symptoms of severe or persistent mental health problems such as severe depression, bipolar disorder, dementia and schizophrenia. However, select alternative and integrative approaches will play an increasingly important role in mental healthcare as research evidence continues to accumulate supporting safety and efficacy.

Advantages of integrative mental health care over the conventional biomedical model include:

- improving response to treatment
- reducing the dosage of a medication (in some cases)
- reducing side effects of medications
- saving money on treatment costs
- having greater control over your symptoms
- greater emphasis on maintaining wellness
- developing a more personalized plan for treatment and prevention

It is important to point out that integrative mental healthcare does *not reject* the use of psychotropic medications, psychotherapy or other mainstream approaches or discount their benefits for mental health problems. Medications and psychotherapy are often very beneficial. Integrative mental health practitioners recommend medications and psychotherapy, however their recommendations *go beyond the limitations of the conventional model of care*, and include a variety of alternative treatments such as herbals, vitamins and other natural supplements, advice on nutrition and physical activity, mindfulness and mind-body practices such as meditation and yoga, and 'energy' therapies such as acupuncture and Healing Touch, *but only when there is research evidence supporting the safety and effectiveness*.

Many mental health problems respond to simple dietary changes such as eating more grains, fresh vegetables and lean meat while cutting down on unhealthy foods such as saturated fats and refined sugar. Healthy lifestyle choices that are beneficial for mental health also include regular exercise, getting enough sleep, and using relaxation and mindfulness techniques for stress management.

In addition to positive lifestyle choices, natural supplements have general beneficial effects on mental health. Select supplements have been established as

safe and effective treatments of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, ADHD, dementia and other mental health problems.

Because integrative mental health care focuses on each person's unique symptoms, needs and circumstances, treatment is highly individualized. This means that there is *no single best treatment* for any particular mental health problem, and the most appropriate treatment plan is determined on the basis of the life story, values, preferences and circumstances of each unique person.

About Dr. Lake's background and qualifications

I completed my medical training at University of California, Irvine, and did my residency in adult psychiatry at Stanford University Hospital. I am board-certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, and I have practiced psychiatry for more than 20 years in diverse settings. I've had extensive experience taking care of patients in hospitals, clinics, emergency rooms and in my private practice. I have been a student of herbal medicine for decades and I am certified in medical acupuncture and in EEG biofeedback. I previously served on the teaching faculty at Stanford University Hospital and I am currently a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at University of Arizona College of Medicine. I've taught physicians and other mental health professionals about integrative mental healthcare at national and international

conferences. I publish a column on integrative mental health care in *Psychiatric Times*, a leading trade publication for mental health professionals and I am a frequent blogger on [Psychology Today](#). I've authored numerous articles and chapters in peer-reviewed medical journals and textbooks, and I've written, co-authored or edited [five textbooks](#) covering the philosophy, theory and practice of integrative mental healthcare.

I've been involved in national and international efforts to establish integrative mental healthcare as a medical sub-specialty in its own right. I founded and previously chaired an initiative aimed at changing mental health care into a more effective, safer and more person-centered model of care: the *American Psychiatric Association Caucus on Complementary and Integrative Medicine*. An important goal of the Caucus is the development of expert resources for educating and training psychiatrists and other mental health care providers in the safe, *evidence-based* uses of alternative and integrative treatments of anxiety, depression and the other mental health problems covered in this series.

How to use the books in this series if you have a mental health problem

Because you're taking the time to read this book, I'm assuming that you, perhaps a relative, friend or loved one have a mental health problem that hasn't gotten

better with psychotropic medications, psychotherapy, or alternative approaches that you've already tried. Perhaps you found this book when searching on the internet for a *more holistic solution* to your mental health problem. Maybe you, a loved one or relative are currently taking a medication for depression, anxiety or another mental health problem and you're experiencing side effects and want to find a treatment that is safer. Or perhaps the medication you are taking *is working* but it's too expensive or your insurance doesn't cover the cost and you can no longer afford to take it. Maybe you've had a particular mental health problem in the past and you are now feeling and functioning better and you're looking for practical tips on maintaining optimal wellness and prevention.

If any one of the above scenarios describes your situation the books in this series provide tools and information that will help you decide on safe, effective and affordable alternative and integrative treatments of mental health problems and for maintaining optimal mental health. You will learn about alternative treatments of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD, PTSD and other mental health problems and how to develop a practical treatment plan addressing your particular symptoms. I'll also guide you in finding quality products and services.

If you're currently taking a medication, an herbal medicine or other natural supplement for a mental health problem *I'm not suggesting that you stop taking it*. That decision should only be made in consultation with the psychiatrist or other medically trained provider who prescribed the medication or recommended the natural supplement you are taking. However, if you don't feel consistently better after taking a medication or a natural supplement at the recommended dosage and for the recommended duration, or you are experiencing unpleasant or unsafe side effects, *I am suggesting* that you remain open minded about a more holistic approach to your mental health problem. If this describes your current situation, I encourage you to tell your physician or other healthcare provider about alternative treatments reviewed in the book on your mental health problem so that you and your provider can have an informed conversation about evidence-based alternative and integrative treatment choices.

By the time you finish reading the book on your particular mental health problem—whether it is ADHD, depression, insomnia, bipolar disorder or a different problem—you will have enough information about a variety of practical and affordable approaches to develop a treatment plan that will help you recover from an ongoing mental health problem and stay healthy. You will know whether

it makes more sense to manage your mental health problem on your own or to seek professional help. Most importantly you will know how to *think about* your personal mental health in more holistic way.

How to use the books in this series books if you are a mental healthcare provider

If you are a mental healthcare provider you may have purchased this book or others in the series to gain a general understanding of the principles and methods of integrative mental healthcare so that you can help your patients find better answers to questions about the range of alternative treatment choices for their mental health problems. You should know that in recent decades there has been a gradual trend toward increased use of complementary and alternative (or 'CAM') therapies in mental healthcare as well as in all areas of healthcare. You may already know that anyone diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder is significantly more likely to use alternative treatments compared to the general public. The situation becomes complicated when you realize that *the majority of people who use alternative therapies for a mental health problem take at least one medication at the same time*—often without telling their doctor or therapist—resulting in *potentially serious safety problems*. Finally, although many alternative therapies have little supporting evidence, the majority of people who

use them to self-treat severe anxiety, severe depression or other serious mental health problems, believe that alternative therapies are as effective as medications. This is an unfortunate over-simplification and misrepresentation of both alternative medicine and mainstream Western medicine. *One size fits all*, doesn't work in medicine or mental health care. The effectiveness of a specific mainstream, alternative or integrative treatment approach depends on a multiplicity of factors including each person's unique genetic and biochemical make-up, cultural and social differences and many other factors that are difficult or impossible to quantify.

Part II: Essential concepts and methods for developing an integrative mental health care treatment plan

Foundations

The books in this series describe alternative and integrative strategies that address a variety of mental health problems. Assuming that your mental health problem *improves*—or at least doesn't get worse—when you use an alternative or integrative approach you may find yourself in a win-win-win situation because you may be able to reduce the dosage of a medication, stay well and have fewer side effects.

Although lifestyle changes are sometimes beneficial for severe mental health problems, they seldom alleviate symptoms entirely. Adequate treatment strategies for severe mental health problems such as severe depressed mood, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, typically include a medication, a natural product (i.e., when there is evidence to support both safety and efficacy), or an augmentation strategy in which a supplement is used to boost the effectiveness of a psychotropic medication. Medications and select natural supplements directly affect the way the brain works and often need to be taken on a long-term basis when dealing with severe depressed mood, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

If you have a severe mental health problem you may feel overwhelmed and out of control much of the time and it may be difficult to make positive lifestyle changes such as more regular exercise, healthy dietary changes and improved sleep. However, once you have responded to a medication and you are consistently feeling and functioning better, lifestyle changes become an important part of every wellness plan. I encourage you to follow a daily routine that includes exercise, good nutrition, relaxation, adequate sleep, and stress management.

Getting started

The following sections describe a step-by-step method you can use to develop an individualized plan for maintaining good mental health or treating symptoms of a specific mental health problem covered in the series. Deciding on a plan that makes sense for you—or a person you are caring for—involves identifying treatments that are supported by research evidence, available where you live, suit your values and preferences, and fit your budget.

When approaching any mental health problem, the best strategy is to stay open minded about a broad range of mainstream and alternative treatment choices and to not rely on a medication, psychotherapy or an alternative approach only.

Mainstream treatments like medications and psychotherapy are often beneficial for mental health problems however when used alone they are seldom adequate.

Natural supplements used in non-Western systems of medicine go beyond single herbals and include complex herbal formulas (i.e. in Chinese medicine, Tibetan medicine and Ayurveda). In addition to herbals and herbal formulas, researchers are now investigating the mental health benefits of vitamins, essential fatty acids, amino acids, trace minerals and multi-nutrient formulas. As I've already mentioned, many natural supplements can be safely combined with psychotropic medications in some cases increasing their effectiveness permitting reduction in

dosage, which in turn reduces adverse effects. These are among the most important benefits of integrative treatment strategies.

In addition to natural supplements many nonpharmacologic approaches are beneficial for maintaining optimal wellness and for treating particular mental health problems. Examples include biofeedback, bright light exposure therapy, mind-body approaches such as mindfulness meditation, yoga and tai chi, and energy therapies such as acupuncture, healing touch, Reiki and qigong.

To increase your chances of getting positive results it is important to use approaches that interest you and that you are motivated to try. *For practical purposes it is also important to use approaches that are available where you live and affordable.* For example, if you find out that a particular Chinese herbal formula is beneficial for improving your memory problem but a quality brand of that herbal formula is difficult to obtain where you live or very expensive, it doesn't make sense to rely on this treatment approach. With some investigation using the books in this series and the internet resources at the end of this book you will be able to identify treatment choices that are safe, effective, available where you live and affordable. It may be helpful to keep a journal in order to track your progress and make notes on any problems you encounter along the

way. Your notes will provide helpful information if you need to re-evaluate your initial treatment plan in case it isn't working.

Because every human being is unique at the level of biology, psychology and culture people often experience the same *kind* of mental health problem in very different ways. As a result, individuals who experience similar subjective symptoms may respond quite differently to a specific medication, herbal or other natural supplement, psychotherapy, a mind-body practice, or another approach. In other words, because each person is unique at multiple levels of mind, body and spirit, there is *no single best treatment* for everyone who has the same *kind of* mental health problem.

To sum up: the best treatment plan should be determined on a case by case basis taking into account unique history, symptoms, values, beliefs, needs, preferences and circumstances.

Safety is *always* the most important consideration

Medications as well as herbals and other natural supplements can cause adverse effects. *Safety should always be the highest priority whenever you are thinking about starting any new medication or natural supplement treatment.*

Technology-based interventions such as machines that use weak electrical current to stimulate the brain, bright light exposure, and virtual reality hardware,

sometimes result in transient feelings of discomfort or disorientation, but do not cause lasting or serious adverse effects.

The books in this series on specific mental health problems contain information about when it is *safe and when it is not safe* to use a specific natural supplement alone or in combination with a medication. When considering starting any new treatment—whether it is a medication, a natural supplement, a mind-body therapy, an energy therapy, or a combination of two or more different treatments—the first step is to carefully review the safety information about the treatment(s) you are considering. *You should try only those treatments or treatment combinations that are known to be both safe and effective.*

Most herbals and other natural supplements used to treat medical and mental health problems are safe when used appropriately at recommended dosages. However, like medications, some natural supplements can cause serious adverse effects if taken at doses that are too high or in combination with other supplements or certain medications. To minimize the risks associated with medications or natural supplements *it is important to find out about potential safety issues before starting any new treatment, or before taking a combined regimen of one or more medications or natural supplements.*

As a rule, it is best to *avoid combining any two or more treatments known to be potentially unsafe when taken together*. For example, you should avoid taking a combination of a specific medication and a natural supplement known to result in a toxic interaction. On the other hand, if a specific combination of two or more medications or supplements is established as both safe and effective for your mental health problem, it is reasonable to consider that combination.

Every book in the series includes important safety information pertaining to the various alternative treatments reviewed in it. You should always notify your psychiatrist, family doctor or other healthcare provider when you are considering taking any herbal medicine or other natural supplement alone or together with a medication. Physicians and other medically trained healthcare providers are knowledgeable about safety and will be happy to provide information about potential safety concerns associated with the treatment you are considering.

If you cannot afford to see a healthcare provider or one is not available where you live, on-line resources provide valuable information about safety problems related to both medications and natural supplements used to treat mental health problems. I've included links to several websites at the end of this book where you can find safety information about a variety of alternative treatment approaches. I encourage you to use these resources when you have questions or

concerns about safety that are not addressed in the books on specific mental health problems.

Understanding your mental health problem

Many factors affect mental health in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, before starting treatment for any mental health problem it is important to have a clear understanding of the underlying causes of your symptoms including medical, psychological, social and cultural factors that might be affecting you. Each book in the series includes a concise summary of medical and psychological causes of the mental health problem covered in that book.

Is your mental health problem caused by a *medical problem*?

Before starting any new treatment, it is *important to find out whether you have a medical problem that may be causing your mental health problem, making it worse, or interfering with treatment*. I am assuming that most people who read this book have access to the internet, reside in a country where there are competent, well-trained medical professionals, and can find quality medical care. If you have a known medical problem and have already been examined and treated by a physician or other health care provider but your medical problem has not improved, it is *possible that the root cause(s) of your symptom(s) were not correctly diagnosed in the first place*. It is also possible that a different

medical or mental health problem may be interfering with the beneficial effects of the mainstream or alternative treatment you have been using. In this case it may be helpful to write down:

- your current symptoms
- how long you've had your symptoms
- your personal circumstances when your symptoms began
- how your symptoms have changed over time
- psychological, social or spiritual problems that make your symptoms worse.

If you've had a mental health problem for a considerable amount of time it is possible—perhaps *likely*—that the underlying causes of your symptoms have changed over time. *If you think you have an undiagnosed or rapidly worsening medical problem, I encourage you to go to an urgent care center or consult with a healthcare provider for expert advice. In this case you may need to be evaluated using specialized diagnostic tests of the blood, urine, vital organs or brain.*

In addition to diagnostic tests used in mainstream Western medicine many non-Western healing traditions use a variety of approaches to detect changes in postulated *subtle* energy that may provide clues about underlying energetic

causes of medical, mental or emotional symptoms. For example, practitioners of Tibetan medicine, Chinese medicine and Ayurveda use information obtained from measuring the pulse to identify energetic *imbalances* associated with illness. Different mental and emotional symptoms are associated with characteristic features in the pulse. Even in cases where there is no *apparent* medical problem, identifying the energetic imbalance that manifests as your particular symptom pattern may help you decide on a treatment plan that incorporates different approaches including a natural supplement, a mind-body practice, psychotherapy, an energy therapy or other approaches that may alleviate the energetic causes of symptoms and restore your body and mind to a healthy state of balance.

If you are experiencing a potentially life-threatening medical or mental health problem, please seek immediate emergency care. Symptoms that may point to a medical or mental health emergency include:

- severe headaches
- dizziness
- changes in vision
- sudden onset difficulty speaking or understanding speech
- recent change in the level of consciousness

- feelings of disorientation
- auditory or visual hallucinations

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, please go to the nearest hospital emergency room or urgent care center.

Taking inventory of your symptoms

When an underlying medical problem—or *problems*—have been identified, evaluated and successfully treated the next step involves taking inventory of your symptoms by answering questions in standardized symptom rating scales or filling in a symptom checklist. For example, common symptoms of depression include:

- loss of energy
- poor concentration
- frequent thoughts of death
- loss of interest
- feelings of worthlessness
- not sleeping enough or sleeping too much
- poor appetite or eating too much

- thoughts of committing suicide

The Hamilton Depression Inventory is a tool used by depressed individuals to rate the severity of their depressed mood. It consists of a series of questions about different symptoms that are part of a larger *symptom pattern* that comprises depressed mood. In taking inventory of your symptoms you will learn a great deal about the mental health problem *or problems* affecting you. Your answers to standardized questions will give you valuable insights that will help you decide on a treatment plan that is appropriate for you—or a person you are caring for.

[Links to questionnaires](#) designed to help you accurately rate the severity of your symptoms are provided in a [companion website](#). If you are experiencing more than one mental health problem, you may find the book in this series on that condition helpful.

Taking inventory of factors that affect your mental health

- What are my symptoms and how do they affect me in my daily life? In a few words describe how your mental health problem affects how you feel or how you function at work, school or in a relationship, e.g., constant fear, feeling sad, no energy, hard to concentrate, etc.

- What factors in my environment might be causing my symptom(s) or making them worse? For example, are my symptoms a reaction to stress at work, school or in a relationship?
- Does someone in my family have a medical or mental health problem that provides a clue to my own mental health problem? Some mental health problems run in families, for example, many people who are severely depressed, bipolar or have a psychotic disorder have relatives with the same kind of mental health problem.
- Do I have a medical disorder that could be related to my mental health problem? Several medical problems can cause or worsen mental health problems. For example, depressed mood is often associated with heart disease and diabetes; bipolar disorder is sometimes associated with a serious head injury or stroke, etc. Generalized anxiety is sometimes a result of poorly controlled diabetes. If you think your mental health problem may be related to an underlying medical problem, it is important to seek medical evaluation and treatment. Successfully treating an underlying medical problem often results in rapid improvement in symptoms of a mental health problem.

- What medications or natural supplements have I tried in the past for my mental health problem? What has worked and what has not? Make a list of all treatments previously tried for your mental health problem. Include both alternative and mainstream treatments.
- If a specific treatment worked for the same mental health problem in the past why did I decide to stop using it? How much time went by before my symptoms returned? When they returned were my symptoms the same or different? For example, did I stop using it because it stopped working? Were there side effects? Was it too expensive? Did I stop taking it because my symptoms improved, and I thought I no longer needed to take it? Answers to these questions will provide valuable clues about what treatments to try next.
- Describe your general state of health in the past 2 to 3 months. For example, have you been healthy? Have you been losing or gaining weight? Is there a problem with fatigue? Were you recently diagnosed with a new medical problem?
- Describe your nutrition and activity level. For example, do you maintain a healthy diet? Do you exercise on a regular basis?

- Describe your general level of stress in the past 2 or 3 months. For example, has work been more stressful recently? Is a problem with your primary relationship or family causing stress? Are other major stresses affecting your day-to-day life?
- Is alcohol or other substance use a problem? For example, does drinking or using a drug interfere with your social or work life? Have there been legal consequences related to drinking or drug use?
- Do you have problems sleeping at night or staying awake during the daytime? For example, problems sleeping may be related to a mental health or medical problem, or they may be caused by alcohol or other substance abuse or the side effects of a medication.
- Have tests been done in the past 2 to 3 months to find out what is causing your mental health problem(s)? For example, have you been evaluated using conventional diagnostic tests of the blood, urine, or diagnostic tests used in non-Western healing traditions such as energetic pulse diagnosis used in Chinese medicine, or homeopathic assessment? If so, what were the findings of such tests and what is your medical or energetic (i.e., in Chinese medicine) diagnosis (if any)?

- List all medications and supplements including herbals and other natural products you are currently taking including dosages and times of day you take them. Include the reasons you are taking them and how long you've been taking them. This information can provide clues about whether treatments are having beneficial or harmful effects. It can also help clarify whether symptoms may be related to adverse effects or interactions between medications and natural supplements.
- Are you currently being treated by a conventionally trained mental health provider or an alternative medical practitioner for a specific medical or mental health problem? if so, include the kind of practitioner, the kind of treatment being followed, and the problem for which you are being treated.
- Do you think that cultural, religious or spiritual issues are affecting your health or mental health? Explain.

Evaluating different treatment choices: evidence, availability, personal preferences and cost

After you've taken inventory of your symptoms and assuming that no medical problems have been identified that may be causing your symptoms or making them worse, the next step involves developing a treatment plan addressing your

particular symptoms. This involves *identifying treatments that are safe, effective, available where you live, and affordable*. This process also involves deciding whether to undertake treatment on your own or with the advice and guidance of a healthcare provider.

Five treatment categories reflect different ways treatments work

Approaches used to treat mental health problems or maintain optimal wellbeing can be divided into 5 categories reflecting different ways treatments work to alleviate symptoms and promote wellbeing:

- **Biological treatments** have beneficial effects at the level of a well-defined molecular mechanism. Medications and natural supplements work in this way.
- **Whole body approaches** have beneficial effects on the body in general and improve both physical and mental health and well-being. Exercise and massage are examples.
- **Mindfulness and mind-body approaches** are based on concepts from traditional healing aimed at improving harmony between mind and body. Approaches in this category often involve using the breath or mental imagery to achieve a calm state of mind. While some mindfulness and mind-body approaches are based on religious or spiritual beliefs, you do

not need to believe in God or follow a spiritual practice in order to benefit from these approaches. Meditation, yoga, Tai-chi, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) are examples.

- **Treatments based on scientifically verified forms of energy** including electricity, magnetic fields, light and sound have beneficial effects on the body and brain. Examples include full-spectrum bright light exposure, electroencephalographic (EEG) biofeedback, cardiac coherence training, cranial electrotherapy stimulation (CES), music and specialized forms of sound therapy.
- **Treatments based on postulated forms of energy** that have not been verified by science such as Reiki, Healing Touch, qigong and prayer may be beneficial at the level of poorly understood energetic processes that play a role in maintaining optimal physical and psychological wellness. Emerging research findings suggest that certain energetic therapies have beneficial effects on mental health.

Three tiers of evidence

I use a 3-tier approach to rate treatments based on the relative strength of evidence.

- **Tier A:** treatments are supported by strong research evidence from rigorously conducted studies or systematic reviews of studies.
- **Tier B:** treatments are supported by research evidence but not to the same degree as tier A treatments.
- **Tier C:** treatments are supported by weak or inconsistent research findings and may be beneficial in some cases

Note that treatments under each tier are listed in alphabetical order and not according to the relative level of evidence, i.e. within that tier. For some mental health problems, *no Tier A treatments are listed*. Although many alternative treatments used in mental healthcare are supported by research evidence, relatively few have been substantiated by consistent findings of large, well-designed placebo-controlled studies. Hence, most alternative treatments presently used in mental health care belong to tiers B or C. Nevertheless, many alternative treatments are frequently recommended by physicians, therapists and alternative practitioners, are widely used by patients, have beneficial effects on mental health problems and are generally safe when used appropriately.

It is important to point out that the problem of limited evidence also pertains to many currently available mainstream treatments of mental health problems

including several psychotropic medications and techniques used in psychotherapy. In other words, some medications prescribed to treat depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and other mental health problems are *not supported* by compelling research findings. In fact, articles written by leading academic psychiatrists published in the peer-reviewed medical journal literature frequently point out that widely prescribed psychotropic medications are probably no more effective than placebos. Hence, if available psychotropics were covered in this series of books (and they are *not*) many would probably be assigned to tier B or tier C.

The paucity of compelling research evidence for many mainstream and alternative treatments is an important factor driving the evolution of mental health care toward increasing use of a range of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) treatments. The result has been a trend toward *integrative mental health care* (see above), a rapidly emerging paradigm in mental health care in which mainstream and alternative treatments are selected based on the highest level of evidence in the context of each patient's unique symptoms, needs, preferences and constraints.

In face of the limitations of available treatment approaches on both the conventional and alternative side of mental healthcare, the good news is that

some medications, natural supplements, mind-body practices and other approaches have consistent beneficial effects on a variety of mental health problems and lack serious safety problems.

Whether you are considering trying a new psychotropic medication or an alternative treatment—or a combined regimen that includes mainstream and alternative treatments—for your mental health problem, it is always best to start with one or more treatments supported by strong evidence. In the books on particular mental health problems the section on treatment planning will guide you through the steps involved in coming up with a plan that addresses your mental health problem incorporating treatment(s) supported by the highest level of evidence for your particular problem.

Important questions to ask before starting treatment

Before starting any treatment, including a natural supplement, a mind-body practice or any other alternative treatment I encourage you to first answer the following questions:

- Which alternative treatment approaches for my mental health problem supported by solid evidence?
- Among treatments supported by solid evidence is there a specific treatment that makes the most sense for me in view of the *severity* of my

symptoms, treatments I've already tried, how well they worked previously, and problems with side effects?

- What (if any) safety problems are associated with the treatment(s) I am considering (including risks of potentially toxic interactions with a medication or natural supplement I am currently taking)?
- Is the treatment I am considering one that I can use *on my own*, or do I need to work with a healthcare provider in order to use it in a way that is both safe and effective?
- Is a treatment I am considering *realistic for me*? In other words, is a treatment I am considering *available* where I live and *affordable*?

Your answers to the above questions will guide you in deciding on a plan that adequately addresses your mental health problem and is *realistic* given constraints on availability and cost.

Deciding whether to use *one or more than one* treatment

An important decision you will need to make early in the course of treatment is whether to try one treatment only or two or more different treatments at the same time. Depending on your symptoms and whether they are mild, moderate or severe, the treatment plan you decide on may be centered around healthy lifestyle changes, a single mainstream or alternative treatment, or a combination

of two or more mainstream or alternative treatments. For example, people who struggle with chronic depressed mood may benefit more from taking an antidepressant together with a natural supplement such as l-methylfolate to boost the effectiveness of their medication. In other cases, the cost and amount of effort involved in using a combined approach may *not* be more beneficial for symptoms of a mental health problem than engaging in regular yoga practice or another mindfulness or mind-body approach. Some individuals who struggle with generalized anxiety feel and function consistently better when they do a daily yoga practice that includes relaxing guided imagery before bedtime.

As a rule, it is *better to keep things as simple as possible using only those treatment approaches that have consistent beneficial effects, that you're motivated to use, and available where you live and affordable (or covered by your health insurance) over the long term.* Following the same logic, it makes sense to try a particular combination of two or more specific treatments *when there is evidence that the combination works better than either treatment alone, and you have the motivation and financial resources to use both approaches.*

It is usually *better to avoid a particular combination of two or more medications or natural supplements if that combination has not been established as both safe and effective.* On the other hand, combining two or more treatments that belong

to *different categories* (i.e. biological, whole body, mind-body, and energetic) is generally safe and may produce beneficial synergistic effects depending on the type and severity of symptoms being treated. For example, regular exercise, early morning bright light exposure, folic acid (especially in the form of l-methylfolate), and an antidepressant are in different treatment *categories* and can be safely combined with a reasonable expectation of relatively greater improvement in symptoms of depressed mood than you might achieve using any one of these approaches alone, and there is no risk of potentially toxic interactions. Examples of safe and effective integrative strategies are included under the treatment summaries in the books on the mental health problems covered in the series.

Different strategies are used to manage moderate versus severe symptoms

Examples of natural supplements that are as beneficial as antidepressants for mild to moderately severe symptoms of mental health problems include certain amino acids and herbals, and the omega-3 essential fatty acids. Certain natural supplements can be safely combined with antidepressants enhancing the response you can expect to get when you take an antidepressant (or a natural supplement) alone. For example, taking the amino acid 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) or the methyl donor S-adenosylmethionine (SAMe) in combination with an

antidepressant may result in a relatively greater antidepressant response than taking an antidepressant, 5-HTP or SAMe alone.

To give you an idea of how the material in the books on specific mental health problems is organized, below is the entry for 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) as it appears in the section on alternative treatments in the book in this series on depression.

5-hydroxy-tryptophan (5-HTP)

- **Name of treatment and category:** 5-HTP is an amino acid that enters the brain more readily and has antidepressant effects at lower dosages compared to a related amino acid called L-tryptophan
- **How the treatment works (where known):** increases brain serotonin levels resulting in improved mood
- **Dosages (for natural products) or frequency of use (for somatic, mind-body or energy approaches):** 300mg/day may be as effective as antidepressants for moderate depressed mood; dosages up to 600mg/day (divided into 2 or 3 separate doses) may be effective against more severe depressed mood

- **Examples of safe and effective treatment combinations:** safe to combine with most antidepressants to boost their effectiveness including some cases of severe depressed mood that have not previously responded to medications only. Some depressed individuals who take 5-HTP or other natural supplements are able to reduce the dosage of their antidepressant without becoming more depressed.
- **Comments about adverse effects and warnings pertaining to treatment combinations that may result in potentially unsafe interactions and should be avoided:** Dosages greater than 100mg are often sedating and should be taken at bedtime; *Warning: combining 5-HTP with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor antidepressant (MAOI) may result in a serious medical condition (i.e. serotonin syndrome) that manifests as anxiety, agitation and elevated blood pressure. This combination is potentially dangerous and should be avoided.*
- **Average duration of treatment needed to achieve beneficial results:** Many persons who take 5-HTP at dosages between 50 and 300mg/day report significant improvement in moderate depressed mood within 3 weeks of daily treatment.

When to manage a mental health problem *on your own* and when to seek advice from a healthcare provider

After you have learned about available evidence-based alternative treatments and identified one or more treatments that make sense for you to try, the next step involves determining whether to start a particular treatment on your own or consult with a healthcare provider for expert advice and guidance. Many alternative treatments of mental health problems can be safely and effectively used without the guidance of a healthcare provider. Examples include most herbals, vitamins, omega-3s and other natural supplements, exercise and other whole-body therapies (e.g. massage and physical activity), changes in diet, stress management, mind-body practices and energy therapies.

However, *some alternative treatments should be used only with the guidance of a practitioner who has considerable expertise and training.* For example, some natural supplements have potentially serious safety risks and it is important to get expert advice before considering taking them. In the treatment summaries **important safety considerations for herbals and other natural supplements when used alone or in combination with a medication are underscored in bold face and italics.**

If you decide to work with an alternative medical practitioner, the following points will help you find someone who is qualified to help you with your mental health problem.

- In order to identify an experienced practitioner of an alternative therapy that interests you it's helpful to get a referral from a health care provider you already know and respect, or a friend or relative who has tried the same approach.
- Once you've identified a healthcare provider, first try to learn about their background, including their education, training, licensing, and certifications.
- When you've identified a healthcare provider who is experienced and knowledgeable in the treatment of your particular mental health problem it's important to find out what the treatment costs and whether it is covered by insurance.
- At your first session with your new healthcare provider it's important to provide a complete history of your mental health problem and a list of treatments you've already tried including treatments that worked and those that did not work or caused adverse effects.

- Be sure to tell your new healthcare provider and *all* your providers, about any changes in your symptoms, any new or worsening medical problems, and any new treatments that you decide to try along the way.

Coming up with a treatment plan that *makes sense for you*

I've already mentioned that the most appropriate treatment plan for your particular mental health problem is based on research evidence together with your personal preferences, treatments that are available where you live, and what you can and *cannot* afford. Taking all of these factors into consideration the *best* treatment plan may be different for two or more individuals who have the same kind of mental health problem. For example, one person's anxiety may respond to a medication and improve even more with daily yoga or a mindfulness meditation practice. However, another person with anxiety may not benefit from the same medication (or have significant adverse effects) or yoga but might feel considerably less anxious after reducing caffeine or refined sugar in their diet while taking a Chinese herbal formula and engaging in a daily exercise program. A third person with anxiety might experience consistent relief using kava and calming essential oils, and so on.

The take home lesson is that *there is no single best treatment for everyone who has anxiety, depression or any other mental health problem. The plan that is most appropriate—and most likely to be beneficial—depends on each person’s unique symptoms in the context of their life story, values, preferences and circumstances.*

When putting together a treatment plan that has a good chance of working for you it is important to keep in mind the specific symptoms you are experiencing, how severe they are, and *treatment approaches you are interested in trying that are available where you live and affordable.* If you’ve already been thinking about improving your nutrition, you are probably motivated to make healthy changes in your diet. If you’ve already been thinking about losing weight you are probably motivated to start a daily exercise routine. On the other hand, even though acupuncture may have established efficacy for your particular mental health problem, if you get nervous just thinking about someone *sticking needles* in you, your experience with acupuncture will probably be quite stressful and the results disappointing.

What to do if your first treatment plan doesn’t work

Perhaps you’ve been following your current treatment plan consistently for the amount of time recommended in the book on your particular mental health

problem, but your symptoms have not improved or have become even worse. Or perhaps you are feeling better, but you are thinking about stopping treatment because of adverse effects. In either case it makes sense to re-evaluate your current treatment plan and think about making changes.

It may be especially difficult to come up with a treatment plan that will be effective the first time around if you have a severe mental health problem that has been difficult to treat in the past, if you are dealing with more than one mental health problem, or if you have a medical problem that is affecting your mental health or interfering with treatment. Try not to worry if your first treatment plan does not result in consistent improvement in your mental health problem. *There are many different approaches to consider and many possible directions to take on a path toward improved mental health.* Using the methods described in this book you will learn how to develop a treatment plan that works better than the one you're currently using.

When re-evaluating your treatment plan, it is helpful to take inventory of your symptoms by answering the same questions you answered when deciding on your first treatment plan. Changes in your symptoms may reflect worsening of your mental health problem, a new mental health problem or a medical problem that you haven't noticed before. In any case it is important to identify changes in

your symptoms before revising your current treatment plan and answering standardized questions can help you do this.

By following the steps outlined in this book you will be able to develop a holistic treatment plan that is safe, effective and affordable. Again, there is no single best treatment approach for everyone who has the same mental health problem.

The important thing is to remain open-minded to trying new approaches if your first treatment plan isn't successful.

Taking first steps towards improving your mental health—*now it's up to you...*

Now that you've finished reading this book and you have a good understanding of how to approach your mental health care in a more holistic way, you're ready to take the next step and apply what you've learned to your particular mental health problem. Whether your goal is maintaining your current level of wellness, finding a treatment that works better than the one you're using now, or recovering from a severe mental health problem, you will find a great deal of practical information about a broad range of treatment choices in the [books in this series](#).

Recovering from a mental health problem and staying well is seldom achieved by taking a medication or a natural supplement alone. *Achieving excellent health in body and mind comes from making daily commitments to your well-being*

through proper diet, exercise and finding meaning in life. I hope the books in this series will help you achieve your personal goals of improved mental health.

Summary of most important points

Below I've summarized the most important points in this book including key steps involved in deciding on a holistic treatment plan taking into account your unique history, symptoms, preferences and circumstances.

- **If you have a severe mental health problem that is interfering with your ability to function at work, in school or in a relationship, or if you are thinking about killing yourself or someone else, *please seek urgent care at the nearest hospital emergency room.***
- If you've recently been seen in an emergency room or hospitalized for a severe mental health problem and you are now feeling and functioning better, the books in this series can help you find reliable information about a variety of alternative treatment approaches.
- ***The chief goal of integrative mental health care is to help each person develop a safe and effective treatment plan that takes into account their unique symptoms, preferences and circumstances.***
- The books in this series are offered as a practical resource on *alternative treatments of* common mental health problems.

- Alternative medicine sometimes called ‘complementary and alternative medicine or CAM—consists of approaches that are currently not used in mainstream Western medicine (also called ‘biomedicine’ and ‘allopathic medicine’).
- Integrative medicine is a person-centered approach to care that incorporates mainstream Western medical treatments and alternative treatment approaches.
- Integrative mental health care is the area of integrative medicine aimed at optimizing emotional and mental wellness and treating specific mental health problems.
- *If you suspect you have a medical problem that has not been diagnosed, is not being properly treated or is getting worse, I encourage you to see a physician or other healthcare provider before stopping your current treatment or starting any new treatment.* Many medical disorders can cause or worsen mental health problems.
- The first step in deciding on a treatment plan involves *taking inventory of your symptoms by answering standardized questions.* Your answers will help you to better understand the nature and severity of your symptoms and guide you in developing an appropriate treatment plan.

- After completing an inventory of your symptoms, the next step is to *carefully review the evidence for different treatment approaches and identify treatments that address your symptoms and that you are open to trying.*
- The next step involves *deciding on a realistic treatment plan using approaches that are available where you live and within your budget.*
- Mild and moderately severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and other mental health problems often respond to lifestyle changes such as stress management, regular exercise, improved nutrition and sleep. *If your symptoms of depression, anxiety or another mental health problem are mild or moderately severe you may be able to adequately care for your mental health needs on your own.*
- *Severe symptoms of depressed mood, bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizophrenia and other serious mental health problems generally do not respond to lifestyle changes alone, and may require long-term treatment with a medication, select natural supplements, or a medication plus a natural supplement (i.e., when there is evidence supporting a particular combination). If you are struggling with a severe mental health problem,*

please get expert advice from a psychiatrist or other mental healthcare provider.

- If you need to take a medication in order to function at work, in school, in a relationship or in other aspects of life, making positive lifestyle changes such as exercising more often, improving your nutrition, getting adequate sleep, and following a regular stress reduction program, can significantly improve your mental health.
- When deciding on a treatment plan, you should first consider Tier A approaches supported by the highest level of evidence. *If no tier A treatments exist for your particular mental health problem, or if you have already tried several tier A treatments without benefit, I encourage you to review the information in the book on your mental health problem to make sure you previously used a quality brand (i.e. if the treatment is a natural supplement) at the recommended dosage and for a period of time that would be expected to help.* By the same token, *if you previously used a whole-body, mind-body or energy approach, I encourage you to review the information in the book on your mental health problem to make sure you*

used that approach in a way and for a duration that would be expected to result in consistent beneficial results.

- *If after reading the book on your mental health problem you discover that you did not previously try a Tier A treatment using a quality brand at the optimal dosage or duration, it makes sense to try the same treatment again this time taking a quality brand at a dosage and for a duration that will more likely achieve consistent results. By the same token if you previously tried a whole body, mind-body or energetic approach that is known to be beneficial for your particular mental health problem, but without benefit, I encourage you try that approach again, ideally with the guidance of a healthcare provider while closely adhering to the optimal technique, frequency and duration of the approach you are trying.*
- ***An important consideration is deciding whether to try one treatment only or two or more treatments at the same time.*** When in doubt it is generally best to keep your treatment plan as simple as possible. *Examples of safe and effective combinations, and unsafe combinations that should be avoided* are included in the detailed descriptions of

treatments in the books in this series on particular mental health problems.

- If your initial treatment plan isn't working after trying it for an amount of time after which you should expect beneficial results, it is prudent to see a healthcare provider to obtain diagnostic tests to make sure a medical problem isn't causing your mental health problem, making it worse, or interfering with treatment.
- If your symptoms have not significantly improved after following your treatment plan for a reasonable amount of time, it is reasonable to consider changing your treatment plan preferably to one that includes treatments in Tier A (if available) or tier B. If you've already used most or all Tier A treatments, or no Tier A treatments are currently available for your particular mental health problem, you may benefit from Tier B or C treatments. When known, the amount of time after which you should expect to see improvement is discussed under each treatment. In some cases, it may be appropriate to continue your current treatment while adding a different treatment. *Before combining two or more treatments first review the comments included under 'safe and effective combinations*

to consider' and 'unsafe combinations to avoid' for the treatments you are considering combining.

- Make sure you understand important safety issues associated with the treatments you are considering including potential risks when particular treatment combinations are used. Well-known safety problems are described under the treatments described for the mental health problems covered in the series. It is best to *avoid combining two or more treatments that can potentially result in serious adverse effects. If you are considering combining two or more treatments after reviewing the information in the book on your particular mental health problem it is best to consult a psychiatrist or other healthcare provider for expert advice and guidance.*
- ***Even when your current treatment plan is working it is important to take inventory of your symptoms from time to time.*** Answering standardized questions about your mental health problem will give you a deeper understanding of your symptoms and useful insights about treatments that may work better than those you've already tried.
- Continue to modify your treatment plan as needed. If your symptoms change over time the treatment plan that makes most sense for you may

need to be changed. *If you are experiencing ongoing symptoms of a severe mental health problem such as schizophrenia, severe depressed mood, bipolar mood swings, cognitive impairment or chronic substance abuse, and you are not feeling and functioning consistently better after trying at least two different treatment plans following the above steps, you've come to the limits of what the books in this series can offer. In this case it is prudent to seek professional care.*

- *If you are experiencing mild or moderate symptoms that do not impair your ability to work, go to school or function in other areas, and you don't feel consistently better after trying at least two different treatment plans for the recommended time, you may be able to safely stop treatment.*

Many people who have mild or moderate symptoms of depressed mood, anxiety or other mental health problems start to feel better over time even in the absence of ongoing treatment. Remember, for mild or moderate symptoms you can expect to benefit from positive lifestyle changes including regular exercise, adequate sleep, a healthy diet, and stress management.

Going deeper

After reading this book you may want to learn more. You can find in-depth information in my other books:

- [**An Integrative Paradigm for Mental Health Care: Ideas and Methods Shaping the Future**](#)
- [**Textbook of Integrative Mental Health Care**](#)
- [**Integrative Mental Health Care: A Therapist's Handbook**](#)
- [**Complementary and Alternative Treatments in Mental Health Care**](#)
- [**Chinese Medical Psychiatry: A Textbook and Clinical Manual**](#)

You can learn more about my books and order them on my [website](#).

Finding quality products and services on the Internet

When you've decided on a treatment plan that makes sense for you the next step is to find quality products and services. This section includes valuable internet resources that will help you select safe, effective and affordable products and services. Some of the resources listed are free while others come with a small subscription fee.

General resources on non-medication treatment approaches

- [Progressive Psychiatry](#) This is the author's website. It includes a comprehensive list of on-line resources on both mainstream mental health care and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) approaches. You can find several full-text articles published by Dr. Lake as well as presentations made at various conferences over the years. The site also includes a blog on integrative mental health care and links to all of Dr. Lake's books.
- [The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\)](#) is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NCCIH is dedicated to exploring complementary and alternative healing practices in the context of rigorous science, training complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) researchers, and disseminating authoritative information to the public and professionals. The site contains extensive reviews of research on all non-medication treatment approaches. A citation index contains over 200,000 citations of studies on all areas of CAM indexed in the National Library of Medicine beginning in 1966. The section includes valuable advice on how to find qualified practitioners of alternative and integrative medicine. The site includes information **en Español**.

Resources on dietary supplements (no fee)

- [National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements](#) provides an extensive on-line library of dietary supplement fact sheets for widely used herbals and other natural products. Different versions are available for consumers and health care professionals. The site includes frequently asked questions (FAQs) and links to scientific monographs. The site includes some information **en Español**.
- [Medline Plus Supplement Information](#) is a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. It includes a comprehensive library of on-line monographs on prescription drugs as well as herbals and other natural product supplements. Each monograph includes safety information on adverse effects and interactions. The site also includes free mental health screening tools, educational brochures, videos and podcasts on common mental health problems.
- [Drugs.com](#) includes a comprehensive library of on-line monographs on prescription medications and natural products including extensive information on adverse effects. It includes an on-line tool for checking

interactions. Different versions are available for consumers and health professionals. The information on the site is also available **en Español**.

- [Naturopaths and Herbalists Association of Australia](#) Founded in 1920, the National Herbalists Association of Australia is the oldest natural therapies association in Australia, and the only national professional body of medical herbalists. Their mission is to serve and support membership (Medical Herbalists and Naturopaths) and to promote and protect the profession and practice of herbal medicine. This website is a portal to on-line resources covering all aspects of herbal medicine as well as complementary and alternative medicine in general. It includes links to valuable resources on research, nutrition, herbals and other natural product supplements, professional associations, educational resources, and reputable distributors and suppliers of herbals and other natural products.
- [The World Health Organization's \(WHO\) traditional, complementary and integrative medicine](#) portal provides a traditional medicine fact sheet and links to worldwide health care resources. WHO seeks to promote

international collaboration and cooperation in the study and use of traditional healing approaches in mental health care.

Resources on natural products and other non-medication treatments (fee)

- [ConsumerLab.com](https://www.ConsumerLab.com) provides independent test results and information to help consumers and healthcare professionals evaluate health, wellness, and nutrition products. Consumer Lab is a certification company and enables companies of all sizes to have their products voluntarily tested for potential inclusion in its list of Approved Quality products and bear its seal of approval. The site is a valuable consumer resource for evaluating different natural products and brands and identifying brands that are both safe and effective.
- [Natural Medicines](https://www.naturalmedicines.com) is a subscription service that provides valuable information on natural products and other non-medication approaches. Like Consumerlab.com, Natural Medicines provides independent reviews of supplements that are authoritative and easy to read. The site provides links to valuable databases on natural products and other approaches. It also includes consumer monographs, patient handouts and offers

continuing education credit on different topics to health care professionals.

- [Herb Research Foundation](#) includes expert compilations on specific herbals that contain carefully selected articles, studies, and discussions by experts that are available as downloads or in print form. The work of the Herb Research Foundation is based on its dedicated holdings of more than 300,000 scientific articles on thousands of herbs.