

**Eisenberg DM, Davis RB,  
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Trends in alternative medicine use in the United States, 1990-1997: results of a follow-up national survey.  
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**CONTEXT:** A prior national survey documented the high prevalence and costs of alternative medicine use in the United States in 1990.

**OBJECTIVE:** To document trends in alternative medicine use in the United States between 1990 and 1997.

**DESIGN:** Nationally representative random household telephone surveys using comparable key questions were conducted in 1991 and 1997 measuring utilization of alternative medicine in 1990 and 1997, respectively.

**PARTICIPANTS:** A total of 1539 adults in 1991 and 2055 in 1997.

**MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES:** Prevalence, estimated costs, and disclosure of alternative therapies to physicians.

**RESULTS:** Use of at least 1 of 16 alternative therapies during the previous year increased from 33.8% in 1990 to 42.1% in 1997 ( $P < .001$ ). The therapies increasing the most included herbal medicine, massage, megavitamins, self-help groups, folk remedies, energy healing, and homeopathy. The probability of users visiting an alternative medicine practitioner increased from 36.3% to 46.3% ( $P = .002$ ). In both surveys alternative therapies were used most frequently for chronic conditions, including back problems, anxiety, depression, and headaches. No significant change in disclosure rates was found between the 2 survey years; 39.8% of alternative therapies were disclosed to physicians in 1990 compared to 38.5% in 1997. The percentage of users paying entirely out-of-pocket for services provided by alternative medicine practitioners did not change significantly between 1990 (64.0%) and 1997 (58.3%) ( $P = .36$ ). Extrapolations to the US population suggest a 47.3% increase in total visits to alternative medicine practitioners, from 427 million in 1990 to 629 million in 1997, thereby exceeding total visits to all US primary care physicians. An estimated 15 million adults in 1997 took prescription medications concurrently with herbal remedies and/or high-dose vitamins (18.4% of all prescription users). Estimated expenditures for alternative medicine professional services increased 45.2% between 1990 and 1997 and were conservatively estimated at \$21.2 billion in 1997, with at least \$12.2 billion paid out-of-pocket. This exceeds the 1997 out-of-pocket expenditures for all US hospitalizations. Total 1997 out-of-pocket expenditures relating to alternative therapies were conservatively estimated at \$27.0 billion, an amount comparable with the projected 1997 out-of-pocket expenditures for all US physician services.

**CONCLUSION:** Alternative medicine use and expenditures increased substantially between 1990 and 1997, attributable primarily to an increase in the proportion of the population seeking alternative therapies, rather than increased visits per patient.