Abstract
The Use of Complementary and Alternative Healthcare for Minor Illness †

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Background: Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is the term used to describe healthcare with approaches outside of the scope of Western biomedicine. Nutrition is often considered to fall under CAM. There is a lack of research on CAM use, including nutritional approaches. The aim of this research study is to understand the patterns of CAM use in New Zealand, specifically in relation to minor illness rather than chronic conditions, and barriers and facilitators of use.

Method: Participants (n = 174) aged 18 years and over without chronic disease living in New Zealand were recruited to complete a brief online survey to capture current practice of using CAM for minor illness and factors that contribute to increased or decreased use. Prevalence of use of different CAM modalities was analysed, and promoting and inhibiting factors investigated.

Results: The majority of participants were aged under 40 years (73%) and female (78%). Half of the participants lived in a household with a current CAM user. Massage therapy was the most common form of CAM (40%), followed by osteopathy and naturopathy (both 16%). Only 9% of respondents reported having seen a nutritionist. The most common reasons were using CAM for a short term illness, as a second opinion, and to treat sleep issues. Nineteen percent of respondents reported using herbal or traditional Māori healing. The majority of users stated they would seek CAM before their GP to be more in control of their health. Main barriers to access included time and cost.

Conclusions: The results provide an insight into current CAM use in New Zealand, and users’ perceptions on the benefit of CAM use for minor illness, increasing control over their health. Nutritionists can build on this understanding and address needs and barriers for the use of their services.

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