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Review Article

Holistic Approach of Nutrients and Traditional Natural Medicines for Human Health: A Review

Megh R. Goyal[1*] and Anamika Chauhan[2]

[1]*Retired Faculty in Agricultural and Biomedical Engineering of the College of Engineering at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, Mayaguez, USA;* [2]*Department of Home Science, Chaman Lal Mahavidhyalya, Landhora, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India*

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a notable shift towards a holistic approach to human health, recognizing the importance of integrating essential nutrients with traditional natural medicines. This review article examines the potential synergy between nutrition and traditional healing practices in promoting well-being and disease prevention. It explores the diverse landscape of traditional medicine systems worldwide, highlighting their cultural significance and accumulated wisdom over generations. Moreover, it sheds light on the scientific foundations of these traditional remedies, showcasing their relevance in modern healthcare. Traditional natural medicines, often sourced from plants, animals, or minerals, offer a wide array of therapeutic options addressing root causes rather than symptoms alone. This enduring wisdom has sparked interest in complementing modern healthcare with traditional practices, aiming for a harmonious integration of tradition and evidence-based medicine. Furthermore, the article underscores the critical role of nutrients in maintaining overall health and preventing chronic diseases. It emphasizes the holistic perspective of health, encompassing mental, emotional, and physical well-being. The relationship between nutrition and health is also explored, emphasizing the importance of a balanced diet. The synergy between traditional natural medicines and nutritional interventions presents a promising avenue for a comprehensive approach to healthcare. The article advocates for collaborative research, interdisciplinary dialogue, and cross-cultural exchanges to harness the collective wisdom of the past and present. By embracing both nutrients and traditional medicines, we can move towards achieving optimal health and wellness, recognizing the profound interconnectedness between humans and the natural world.

Introduction

The pursuit of holistic well-being and the maintenance of optimal health have been enduring goals of human civilization. In recent times, a compelling shift towards a holistic approach that integrates both essential nutrients and traditional natural medicines has emerged as a promising paradigm in healthcare. This holistic perspective acknowledges that health transcends the mere absence of disease, emphasizing the importance of considering the individual and encompassing physical, mental, and emotional aspects. It stands in contrast to reductionist medical approaches that often address symptoms in isolation. Rooted in ancient wisdom and informed by contemporary scientific understanding, this holistic approach recognizes the interconnectedness between human health and the broader natural world. This introduction sets the stage for an exploration of the synergistic potential of combining nutrients and traditional natural medicines to promote well-being and prevent disease, highlighting the cultural significance of traditional healing practices and the scientific underpinnings of both modalities.[1–3]

This review article explores the synergistic potential of merging nutrition and traditional healing practices, aiming to advance well-being, prevent diseases, generate and disseminate knowledge on the holistic use of nutrients and traditional natural medicines, foster intellectual discourse, and enrich human understanding in the field. The literature review was done on various topics in this article using the following sources: published articles in peer-reviewed journals, ethnobotanical books, scientific data (such as: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, Google search, and other web search engines).

Overview of the holistic approach to human health

The holistic approach to human health represents a comprehensive

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***Correspondence to:** Megh R. Goyal, College of Engineering at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, Mayaguez, 00680, USA. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2288-9920. Tel: +1-787-536-0039, E-mail: goyalmegh@gmail.com

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and integrated perspective that considers the entirety of an individual's well-being, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual aspects. This approach seeks to move beyond the reductionist model of healthcare, which often focuses on isolated symptoms or specific diseases, and instead embraces the interconnectedness of all facets of human life.[4]

Holistic view of health

The fundamental tenet of the holistic approach is that health is a dynamic condition of balance and harmony within the body and mind, rather than only the absence of illness. This perspective is consistent with the definition given by the World Health Organization, "health is not merely an absence of disease or sickness, but is a complete state of mental, physical, and social wellness".[2] The fact that health is a complex term that includes mental and social aspects in addition to the absence of sickness is emphasized by this definition.

Consideration of multiple factors

The holistic and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) approaches recognize the wide range of elements that might impact one's health, including the environment, cultural norms, heredity, and lifestyle. It acknowledges that these factors interact and intertwine, shaping an individual's overall health. For example, diet, exercise, stress levels, and social connections all play integral roles in determining a person's wellness according to Canadian private health insurance.[5]

Emphasis on prevention

Prevention is a central tenet of the holistic approach to health. Rather than waiting for illness to manifest and then treating it, this perspective advocates for proactive measures to maintain health and prevent disease. This might include dietary plans that promote the body's innate capacity for healing and balance, stress-reduction methods, and lifestyle adjustments.[6]

Holistic healthcare modalities

Holistic healthcare modalities incorporate a diverse range of modalities and practices, including but not limited to nutrition, exercise, mindfulness, meditation, herbal medicine, acupuncture, and traditional therapeutic methods like traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Ayurveda. These modalities are often chosen based on their ability to address the root causes of ailments and promote overall well-being rather than merely alleviating symptoms.[7]

Integrative methods

Integrative methods are an essential aspect of the holistic approach. They encourage collaboration between different healthcare disciplines, recognizing that no single approach has all of the answers. Integrative healthcare teams may include conventional medical practitioners, naturopaths, nutritionists, mental health professionals, and complementary and alternative medicine providers, all working together to address the diverse needs of the patient.[8]

The holistic approach to human health is an integrated and comprehensive perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual well-being. Unlike traditional healthcare models that often focus on treating specific symptoms or diseases, the holistic approach views health as a dynamic state of balance and harmony within the body and mind. It is consistent with the World Health Organization's definition of health,[2] which extends beyond the mere absence of illness to encompass mental, physical, and social well-being. This approach acknowledges that multiple factors, including genetics, lifestyle choices, environmental conditions, and cultural practices, collectively influence an individual's health. It emphasizes the importance of considering all these elements in unison, understanding that they interact and intertwine to shape a person's overall health. Key aspects include a focus on prevention, the incorporation of various healthcare modalities like nutrition, exercise, mindfulness, and traditional healing practices, and advocating for an integrative approach that combines different healthcare disciplines. This comprehensive view advocates proactive measures to maintain health, emphasizing lifestyle modifications, stress reduction, and nutritional strategies, while also integrating conventional medical practices with alternative therapies like acupuncture, herbal medicine, and mindfulness techniques (Table 1).[9–15]

Traditional natural medicines: Cultural significance and wisdom of traditional healing practices from around the world

Traditional healing practices are deeply ingrained in cultures worldwide and offer unique insights into humanity's relationship with nature and the body. These practices, passed down through generations, vary widely in their approaches, encompassing herbal remedies, spiritual rituals, and holistic philosophies. This exploration delves into a selection of traditional healing practices from different regions, shedding light on their historical roots, cultural significance, and enduring relevance.

Ayurveda in India

Ayurveda is one of the oldest holistic treatment systems in the world, having been practiced for over 5,000 years. Rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, Ayurveda emphasizes balance among the body, mind, and spirit. Central to Ayurveda is the belief in three doshas-Vata, Pitta, and Kapha-which represent individual constitutions and imbalances. Ayurvedic practitioners use herbal treatments, dietary recommendations, and lifestyle modifications to restore harmony.[16] Ayurveda's holistic approach has gained recognition globally for its potential to complement modern medicine.

Indian traditional medicines, deeply rooted in the ancient wisdom of the Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani systems, embrace a holistic approach to human health that encompasses the physical, spiritual, and mental dimensions of wellness. Ayurveda emphasizes the balance of bodily energies or "doshas" (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and prescribes natural remedies, including herbal formulations, dietary recommendations, and lifestyle practices, tailored to an individual's constitution.[17] Siddha medicine, originating in South India, similarly addresses health by balancing the three humors (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and incorporates herbal medicine, mineral substances, and therapeutic practices.[18] Unani medicine, influenced by Greek and Islamic traditions, focuses on humoral theory and utilizes natural substances, especially herbs and minerals, to restore the balance of bodily fluids.[19] While deeply rooted in cultural and historical significance, these traditional systems are gaining recognition in modern scientific research. Studies have highlighted the potential of Indian traditional medicines in managing various health conditions, e.g., use of turmeric in inflammation management and triphala ("three fruits" consisting of *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Terminalia bellirica*, and *Terminalia chebula*) in digestive health.[1,20]

TCM

TCM is an integrated healthcare system that originated in China over thousands of years. It encompasses acupuncture, herbal medicine, dietary therapy, and qigong exercises. Qi, or life energy, and

Table 1. Significance of integrating nutrients and traditional natural medicines

Aspect	Explanation	Significance
Cultural preservation	Integrating traditional medicines helps preserve cultural knowledge and practices.	It maintains the richness of cultural heritage while advancing healthcare.[9]
Enhanced absorption	Nutrients can improve the absorption and efficacy of certain natural medicines.	This ensures that traditional remedies are more effective and efficient in addressing health issues.[10]
Evidence-based approach	Combining scientific research with traditional knowledge provides an evidence-based approach to healthcare.	It bridges the gap between tradition and modern medicine, offering validated treatment options.[11]
Holistic healthcare	Combining nutrients and traditional medicine promotes holistic healthcare by addressing both nutritional deficiencies and specific health issues.	It supports the body's overall well-being and helps prevent and treat various health conditions.[12]
Nutrient deficiency correction	Traditional medicines can sometimes deplete essential nutrients. Integrating nutrients helps correct these deficiencies.	Ensuring nutrient balance is crucial for long-term health and to prevent adverse effects of traditional remedies.[10]
Personalized medicine	Tailoring nutrient and natural medicine combinations to an individual's specific needs and genetics.	This approach increases treatment efficacy and reduces the risk of adverse reactions.[13]
Reduced side effects	Nutrients can help mitigate potential side effects of natural medicines.	This integration can make traditional remedies safer and better tolerated by patients.[14]
Synergistic effects	Nutrients and natural medicines often work together synergistically, enhancing their individual benefits.	This synergy can lead to better health outcomes and may reduce the need for pharmaceutical interventions.[15]

the harmony of Yin and Yang energies are the foundational ideas of TCM. Practitioners diagnose and treat illnesses by restoring this balance. Acupuncture has gained international acceptance for its efficacy in pain management and various health conditions.[21]

Chinese culture and philosophy form the foundation of TCM, an age-old, holistic healing system that has developed over thousands of years. TCM takes a comprehensive approach to human health, viewing the body as a complex system where physical, mental, emotional, and environmental factors are interconnected. At the core of TCM philosophy is the concept of Qi, the vital life energy that flows through the body's meridians, and the dynamic balance between Yin and Yang forces. TCM encompasses a wide range of therapeutic modalities, with herbal medicine and acupuncture being the most well-known. Herbal medicine in TCM relies on a vast *Pharmacopeia* of natural substances, such as herbs, minerals, and animal products, to restore health balance and to promote health. These substances are often combined into intricate formulas tailored to an individual's specific patterns of disharmony. Acupuncture involves the precise insertion of fine needles into specific acupoints along meridians to stimulate Qi flow and correct imbalances. Other TCM practices include dietary therapy, qigong exercises, and lifestyle recommendations—all of which aim to maintain health, prevent disease, and address the root causes of ailments.[22] The holistic perspective of TCM views the body as a self-regulating system capable of healing when balance is restored. Modern scientific research has increasingly explored the efficacy of TCM therapies, investigating herbal remedies like ginseng for energy and astragalus for immune support.[23,24] Within the holistic healthcare framework, TCM offers a profound and time-tested approach to honor the interconnectedness of the body, mind, and environment, with a focus on the preservation of health and the restoration of balance.

Native American healing traditions

Indigenous cultures in North and South America have diverse healing practices that are deeply rooted in a profound connection with nature. These traditions often involve the use of medicinal plants, sweat lodges, and spiritual ceremonies. For example, the native community Cherokee uses herbs like yarrow and blackberry for healing, and their Green Corn Ceremony is a spiritual and physical renewal practice.[25] Native American healing emphasizes the importance of harmony between humans and the environment.

African traditional medicine

Africa boasts a wealth of traditional healing practices influenced by diverse cultures and belief systems. Practices range from divination and rituals to the use of specific plants for medicinal purposes. Traditional healers, known as "*sangomas*" in South Africa, often serve as community leaders and offer treatments for various ailments, drawing on ancestral knowledge.[26] African traditional medicine showcases the role of spirituality and community in healthcare.

Cultural significance and historical context of traditional remedies

Cultural significance

Traditional remedies are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of societies, representing a repository of indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. They are often intertwined with cultural identity, spirituality, and community cohesion. These practices reinforce cultural values and strengthen the connection between individuals and their heritage.[27] For example, the use of specific plants in Native American healing traditions is not just about physical healing but also about maintaining a spiritual connection to the land and ancestors.[27]

Historical context

The historical context of traditional remedies is a testament to hu-

man adaptability and resilience. Many traditional healing practices have ancient origins and have evolved in response to changing environments, migrations, and encounters with other cultures. For instance, TCM traces its roots back thousands of years and has been shaped by various historical influences, including Taoist philosophy, the spread of Buddhism, and interactions with neighboring cultures.[28] Understanding this historical context helps to contextualize the development of these practices.

Preservation of traditional knowledge

Traditional remedies also serve as a vital repository of traditional knowledge related to medicinal plants, animal products, and healing techniques. This knowledge is often transmitted orally or through apprenticeships within communities. Efforts to document and preserve this knowledge are critical not only for the cultural heritage of communities but also for the advancement of modern medicine. Ethnobotanical studies, for instance, have been instrumental in recording traditional plant uses and guiding conservation efforts.[29]

Community well-being

Traditional remedies are integral to community well-being, offering accessible and culturally relevant healthcare options. They are often the first line of defense against common health issues and can address the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of health. Additionally, they foster a sense of empowerment and self-reliance within communities. Traditional healers, recognized and respected members of their communities, play a pivotal role in providing care and guidance.[30]

Yoga and meditation

Yoga and meditation stand as integral pillars within the holistic approach to human health, intertwining the ancient wisdom of traditional healing systems with contemporary scientific understanding. Yoga, rooted in Indian culture, offers a comprehensive system that seeks to harmonize the physical, spiritual, and mental dimensions of well-being. Through physical postures (asanas), controlled breathing exercises (pranayama), ethical principles (yamas and niyamas), and meditation techniques, yoga fosters an alignment between individuals and the cosmos, emphasizing holistic wellness.[31] Similarly, meditation, a practice spanning cultures and traditions, holds a profound place in holistic healthcare. Its core aim is the cultivation of mindfulness, self-awareness, and inner tranquility. Meditation techniques nurture mental clarity, emotional equilibrium, and spiritual insight, embodying the holistic principle of inner harmony.[32] Beyond their cultural significance, scientific research underscores the myriad health benefits of yoga and meditation. Studies reveal their capacity to reduce stress, ameliorate mental health conditions, enhance physical flexibility and balance, and promote overall well-being.[33] As holistic healthcare continues to evolve, yoga and meditation serve as essential tools that honor ancient wisdom while providing evidence-based avenues to nurture holistic health.

Darwinian medicine

Darwinian medicine, also known as evolutionary medicine, uses evolutionary biology concepts to address medical and public health issues. It draws on Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to enhance our understanding of human diseases and to develop strategies for prevention and treatment. In contrast to the outdated concept of medical Darwinism, which focuses on human species concerns, Darwinian medicine is primarily concerned with improving healthcare.

This field does not prescribe specific methods or specialized research areas but rather provides a foundational framework for all medical and clinical research studies. Using evolutionary models to study antibiotic resistance and the persistence of disease-causing genes are examples of practical uses. On a more fundamental level, it encourages scientists to reconsider their understanding of a disease and move away from the idea that the body is a designed machine. Evolutionary medicine encompasses a wide range of applications, from well-established methods like population genetics to newer efforts aimed at explaining traits that render the human body susceptible to disease, such as a woman's small birth canal. These justifications may stem from a trait's suggested adaptive value, its evolutionary history, or phylogeny. This method is used in four distinct domains in this field: cell lines, pathogen characteristics, human traits, and pathogen genes. Darwinian medicine encompasses eleven research fields by examining the connections between various kinds of explanations and study subjects.[34]

Circadian medicine/biology

The field of circadian medicine has emerged from chronobiology and sleep research, aiming to apply insights into the circadian system's role in urbanized societies to improve health and to address disease in both outpatient and inpatient settings. Even with its explosive expansion, the field of circadian medicine still lacks a systematic framework for organizing observations regarding the interplay of sleep, the circadian system, and the balance between health and sickness. A framework like this is necessary to classify data and to determine possible causal connections. The concept of "circadian health" and its relationship to general health was first described in the framework. The relationship between sleep and the circadian rhythm as well as the delicate balance between health and illness are then described.[35]

Allopathy drugs

Allopathy (often referred to as conventional or Western medicine) is a well-established healthcare system that relies on pharmaceutical drugs as a primary mode of treatment for various diseases and conditions. Allopathic drugs are typically synthesized chemical compounds designed to target specific disease mechanisms or symptoms. These drugs undergo rigorous testing through clinical trials to establish safety and efficacy. While allopathy has made remarkable advancements in managing acute and critical health issues, it often emphasizes symptom management and disease treatment rather than prevention or addressing underlying causes. Despite its effectiveness in many cases, concerns have arisen about potential side effects, drug interactions, and overreliance on pharmaceutical interventions. In the context of the holistic approach to health, allopathy can complement other healthcare modalities by providing acute care and life-saving treatments, but it may benefit from a more integrated approach that incorporates nutrition, lifestyle modifications, and traditional natural medicines to promote long-term well-being and to prevent chronic diseases.[36] The exploration of traditional healing practices from around the world, such as Ayurveda, TCM, and Native American and African traditional medicines, along with the holistic disciplines of yoga and meditation, reflects the

Table 2. Scientific foundations of traditional remedies

Scientific foundations of traditional remedies	Description of the scientific basis	Examples
Active compounds and pharmacology	Many traditional remedies contain scientifically recognized active compounds with pharmacological properties.	Curcumin, an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compound found in turmeric.[37]
Antimicrobial properties	Traditional remedies often exhibit antimicrobial properties, scientifically validated in modern research.	Honey's antimicrobial activity is attributed to hydrogen peroxide and antimicrobial peptides.[38]
Cultural knowledge of plant properties	Indigenous cultures often possess in-depth knowledge of local plants with medicinal properties.	The rosy periwinkle led to the development of metformin, an antidiabetic drug.[39]
Empirical observations	Traditional remedies are based on centuries of empirical observations and practical experiences.	Willow bark contains salicin, a precursor to aspirin.[40]
Synergy and combinatorial effects	Traditional remedies often rely on the synergy of multiple ingredients for enhanced efficacy.	Certain combinations of herbs in traditional Chinese medicine exhibit greater therapeutic effects.[15,41]

rich cultural diversity and profound wisdom embedded in these ancient systems. Ayurveda, with its focus on the balance of doshas, and TCM, centered on the harmony of Qi and the Yin-Yang principle, offer insights into health that go beyond the physical to encompass mental and spiritual well-being. These practices, deeply rooted in their respective cultural and historical contexts, emphasize the interconnectedness of humans with nature and the universe. The significance of such traditional remedies lies not just in their therapeutic value but also in their role in preserving cultural heritage and identity. Their ability to supplement contemporary treatment has garnered them notoriety worldwide. They offer a comprehensive approach to health, incorporating physical, emotional, and spiritual components.

Yoga and meditation, as integral components of holistic health, align physical postures and breathing with mental focus and spiritual mindfulness, offering benefits that extend beyond physical health to mental and emotional balance. The field of Darwinian medicine brings a unique perspective by applying evolutionary principles to understand and address health issues. Meanwhile, allopathy focuses on pharmaceutical interventions and acute care, highlighting the requirement for a more integrated strategy that incorporates the best elements of contemporary and conventional methods. These diverse healing traditions and practices underscore the importance of a holistic view of health, recognizing the intricate balance among the body, mind, environment, and cultural influences in the pursuit of wellness. Tables 2–4 focus on various aspects of traditional medicine remedies.[14,15,37–50]

Table 3. Examination of the bioactive compounds in traditional natural medicines

Bioactive compounds in traditional natural medicines	Description of compounds and pharmacological properties	Examples
Chemical diversity	Traditional natural medicines contain diverse bioactive compounds, including alkaloids, flavonoids, terpenoids, and polyphenols.	Alkaloids like morphine (from opium poppy) have analgesic properties. Flavonoids such as quercetin exhibit antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects.[14,42]
Mechanisms of action	Understanding mechanisms of action is crucial for evaluating therapeutic potential.	Curcumin, derived from turmeric, exhibits anti-inflammatory properties through various molecular pathways.[43] Quinine, obtained from cinchona bark, treats malaria by inhibiting parasite growth.[44]
Pharmacological properties	Bioactive compounds often possess specific pharmacological properties contributing to therapeutic effects.	Artemisinin, from sweet wormwood, has potent antimalarial properties.[45] Resveratrol, found in grapes and red wine, benefits cardiovascular health.[46]

Table 4. Modern scientific studies that support the efficacy of traditional remedies

Traditional remedy	Health condition treated	Scientific study supporting efficacy
Echinacea	Common cold	Meta-analyses have indicated that Echinacea extract can reduce the duration and severity of common cold symptoms.[47]
Ginger	Nausea and vomiting	Multiple studies support the use of ginger to alleviate chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting.[48]
Honey	Wound healing	Clinical trials have shown that honey is effective in wound healing due to its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties.[49]
Turmeric (Curcumin)	Inflammation and arthritis	A randomized controlled trial demonstrated the anti-inflammatory effects of curcumin in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.[50]

Table 5. Integration of traditional medicine into evidence-based healthcare

Aspect of integration	Description
Collaboration and integration	Encouraging collaboration between traditional and conventional healthcare systems for comprehensive patient care.[54]
Education and training	Providing education and training for traditional medicine practitioners to ensure safe and effective practice.[55]
Healthcare policy and insurance	Developing policies that recognize and reimburse traditional medicine services through health insurance systems.[56]
Recognition of traditional medicine	Acknowledging traditional medicine as a valid and valuable component of healthcare systems.[56]
Regulation and standardization	Developing regulatory frameworks and quality standards for traditional medicines and practitioners.[15]
Research and evidence	Conducting scientific research to establish the safety and efficacy of traditional remedies.[56]

Ayurvedic medicine

Ayurvedic medicine, originating from ancient Indian traditions, embodies the holistic approach to human health by addressing physical, spiritual, and mental aspects of well-being. Ayurvedic remedies are predominantly derived from natural sources such as herbs, minerals, and plant extracts, often prepared through traditional processes like decoctions and oil infusions.[51] These remedies are designed to balance an individual's unique constitution, or "dosha," consisting of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha elements, to promote optimal health.[52] Ayurveda underscores the importance of individualized treatment and prevention, aiming to address the root causes of ailments rather than merely alleviating symptoms. While Ayurvedic medicines have a rich cultural and historical significance, contemporary scientific research is increasingly exploring their efficacy and safety. Studies have highlighted the potential of Ayurvedic herbs and formulations in managing various health conditions, such as turmeric for its anti-inflammatory properties and ashwagandha for stress reduction.[1,53] Within the holistic healthcare framework, Ayurvedic medicines offer valuable natural alternatives that align with the principles of prevention and holistic well-being. Table 5 presents aspects of traditional medicines that have been integrated into evidence-based healthcare.[15,54–56]

Interconnection between nutrition and physiological balance

The interconnection between nutrition and physiological balance is a multifaceted and complex relationship that profoundly influences overall health and well-being.[15] Nutrition plays a pivotal role in maintaining the body's physiological equilibrium; conversely, the body's physiological processes dictate its nutritional requirements.

Nutrient supply and cellular function

A diversified diet provides the micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) and macronutrients (proteins, fats, and carbohydrates) required for good cell and tissue function (Table 6).[10,14,57–76] These nutrients serve as building blocks, energy sources, and cofactors for enzymatic reactions.[75] For instance, carbohydrates supply glucose, the primary energy source for cells, while proteins provide the amino acids necessary for protein synthesis and numerous physiological processes.

Homeostasis and regulation

Nutritional intake and metabolism contribute significantly to maintaining homeostasis, which is the body's ability to regulate internal conditions, such as temperature, pH, and blood sugar levels. For instance, insulin, a hormone produced in response to carbohydrate intake, helps regulate blood glucose levels.[77,78] Adequate vitamin and mineral intake is crucial for enzymatic reactions that control metabolic pathways, ensuring that homeostasis is maintained.[79]

Immune system and inflammation

Nutrition profoundly influences the immune system's function. Deficiencies or imbalances in specific nutrients can compromise immune responses.[79] Conversely, proper nutrition supports immune function, helping the body defend against infections and diseases. For instance, vitamin C plays a crucial role in immune cell activity and reducing inflammation.[14,58]

Hormonal regulation

Nutrition influences the production and secretion of hormones that regulate various physiological processes. Adequate nutrient intake is necessary for the synthesis of hormones such as thyroid hormones, sex hormones, and growth hormone.[80] Hormonal imbalances resulting from inadequate nutrition can lead to various health issues.[81]

Genetic and epigenetic influences

Nutrition can also have epigenetic effects, which are modifying gene expression patterns that influence physiological processes.[80] Dietary choices can impact DNA methylation and histone modification, which, in turn, affect susceptibility to diseases and the physiological balance.[76,79,80–82]

Dietary guidelines for disease prevention and overall well-being

A diet that is rich in nutrients and well-balanced is essential for preventing illness and promoting general health. Therefore, dietary guidelines are essential tools for individuals and healthcare professionals to optimize nutrition, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and support physical and mental health.[82,83]

Plant-based diet

The present guidelines place a strong emphasis on plant-based diets. Whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, fruits, and vegetables are excellent providers of fiber, antioxidants, and important vitamins and minerals. The risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and numerous cancer types is decreased by these factors.[76,83–87]

Table 6. Essential nutrients: Vitamins, minerals, and macronutrients

Nutrient type	Role in the body	Examples
Vitamins		
Vitamin A	Vision, skin health, immune system	Carrots, spinach, sweet potatoes[57]
Vitamin C	Collagen production, immune support	Citrus fruits, strawberries[14,58]
Vitamin D	Bone health, immune function	Sunlight, fatty fish[59]
Vitamin E	Antioxidant, skin health	Nuts (e.g., peanuts, almonds), seeds (e.g., sunflower), spinach[14,60]
Vitamin K	Blood clotting, bone health	Leafy greens (e.g., kale, spinach), broccoli, Brussels sprouts[61,62]
Vitamin B1	Energy metabolism, nerve function	Grains, pork, nuts, beans[63–65]
Vitamin B2	Energy production, tissue repair	Dairy products, lean meats, leafy greens[65]
Vitamin B3	DNA repair, skin health	Meat, fish, poultry, whole grains, nuts[65,66]
Vitamin B5	Fatty acid synthesis, energy metabolism	Meat, whole grains, vegetables[65,66]
Vitamin B6	Neurotransmitter synthesis, immune function	Poultry, fish, bananas, potatoes[65,66]
Vitamin B7	Fatty acid synthesis, skin health	Nuts, eggs, liver, sweet potatoes[65,66]
Vitamin B9	DNA synthesis, cell division	Leafy greens, legumes, fortified cereals[65,66]
Vitamin B12	Red blood cell formation, nerve function	Animal products (meat, dairy), fortified foods[65,67]
Minerals		
Calcium	Muscle function, bone health	Leafy greens, dairy products[66]
Iron	Oxygen transport, energy production	Red meat, beans, fortified Cereals[10,66,68]
Potassium	Blood pressure regulation, nerve function	Bananas, potatoes, Spinach[62,66,69]
Macronutrients		
Carbohydrates	Energy source, brain function	Whole grains, fruits, Vegetables[69–73]
Proteins	Tissue repair, immune function	Lean meats, dairy, legumes, nuts[73–75]
Fats	Energy storage, organ protection	Avocados, olive oil, fatty fish[66,73,74,76]

Portion control

In addition, portion control in moderation lowers the danger of over-eating, which is a major contributor to the development of many chronic illnesses, and helps people maintain a healthy weight.[83,87]

Lean proteins

Lean proteins should also be prioritized. Lean protein sources—fish, poultry, tofu, lentils, and low-fat dairy products—are vital for maintaining muscle mass because they minimize the consumption of saturated fat while providing essential amino acids.[66,84]

Fat, sugar, and salt intake

Less saturated and trans fats should be consumed. Reducing the consumption of saturated and trans fats, which are commonly found in processed snacks, fried meals, and portions of fatty meat, can lower cholesterol and the risk of heart disease.[85]

Moreover, healthy fats should be chosen. Sources of good fats include olive oil, nuts, seeds, and avocados. These fats promote cardiovascular and mental wellness.[86]

Additionally, sugar intake should be monitored. Consuming too much added sugar is linked to obesity and a higher chance of developing type 2 diabetes. The intake of processed meals, sweets, and sugary drinks should be reduced.[87] Similarly, sodium intake should be reduced. High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can result from a high-salt diet. Heart health is improved by consuming fewer processed meals high in salt content and adding flavor with herbs and spices.[88]

Hydration and other recommendations

Staying hydrated is another important guideline. Proper hydration is essential for overall well-being. Water supports digestion, circulation, and temperature regulation. People should aim to drink water throughout the day.[82,89] As a general rule, one should consume eight glasses of water, sleep for eight hours, perform eight hours of work, and maintain eight hours of spiritual health per day. Planning balanced meals is also important. Creating balanced meals that include a variety of foods ensures the intake of a wide range of nutrients. A mix of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and fiber should be incorporated into meals as recommended by physicians.[90] Furthermore, one should practice mindful eating by paying attention to hunger cues, savoring food flavors, and eating slowly. Mindful

Table 7. List of challenges

Challenge	Description with citation
Communication and coordination of care	Effective communication and coordination among conventional healthcare providers and CAM practitioners can be challenging, leading to fragmented care.[96]
Cost and affordability	CAM treatments may not be affordable for all patients, and some can be costly, leading to financial barriers to access.[97]
Credentialing and licensing	Determining the qualifications and credentials of CAM practitioners can be challenging, as there is no uniform credentialing system across different therapies.[98]
Cultural acceptance	CAM therapies often have cultural or traditional roots that may not be widely accepted or understood by patients and healthcare providers from different cultural backgrounds.[99]
Ethical and legal considerations	Ethical dilemmas can arise when patients pursue CAM treatments that conflict with conventional medical recommendations, raising questions about informed consent and safety.[100]
Insurance coverage	Many CAM treatments may not be covered by health insurance, limiting accessibility for patients who rely on insurance for healthcare services.[101]
Lack of standardization	Variability in training, licensing, and regulation of CAM practitioners can lead to inconsistent care and safety concerns.[8,101]
Patient education and informed decision-making	Ensuring that patients are well-informed about CAM options, their potential benefits, and risks is crucial for shared decision-making.[102]
Research and evidence-based practices	Some CAM therapies lack rigorous scientific evidence of their safety and efficacy, making it difficult to integrate them into evidence-based healthcare.[103]

CAM, complementary and alternative medicine.

eating promotes effective communication for cancer–care, healthy eating behaviors and weight management.[91] Finally, an individualized approach should be used. It must be recognized that dietary needs vary among individuals based on age, activity level, and health status. One size does not fit all ages. A registered dietitian should be consulted for personalized guidance.[92,93]

Synergy and integration

The use of synergy and integration in healthcare is a potent strategy that enhances patient outcomes and care by fusing the best aspects of complementary and alternative medicine, orthodox treatment, and lifestyle adjustments.[8,15,93]

The concept of synergy

Synergy in healthcare refers to the cooperative interaction of multiple modalities or treatments that result in an outcome greater than the sum of their individual effects.[8,15] It recognizes that certain combinations of therapies can increase the effectiveness of therapy, reduce adverse effects, and promote patient satisfaction.

Integration of conventional medicine and complementary therapies

One key aspect of synergy and integration is the collaboration between conventional medicine and complementary therapies. Conventional medicine, with its evidence-based practices and pharmaceutical interventions, excels in acute care and the treatment of many diseases. However, it may fall short in addressing chronic conditions and the holistic needs of a patient.[94] Alternative treatments that emphasize health, prevention, and the underlying causes of sickness are provided by complementary therapies (such as: acupuncture, chiropractic care, and herbal treatment) as well as mind-body activities (such as yoga and meditation). These therapies often emphasize the importance of the mind-body connection and the role of lifestyle factors in health.[94]

Evidence-based synergy

Synergy and integration are most effective when supported by rigorous scientific research. This includes conducting clinical trials and studies to evaluate the safety, efficacy, and cost-effectiveness of integrative healthcare approaches. Evidence-based practices help to identify which combinations of treatments are most beneficial for specific conditions and patient populations.[94]

Patient-centered care

The foundation of integration and synergy is a patient-centered approach. To create customized treatment therapies that take into account each patient's particular requirements, preferences, and values, healthcare practitioners collaborate closely with patients. This makes it possible for individuals to actively engage in their healthcare decisions and promotes a relationship of collaboration between patients and providers.[95,96]

Multidisciplinary healthcare teams

Synergy and integration often involve multidisciplinary healthcare teams that include medical doctors, nurses, nutritionists, physical therapists, mental health professionals, and complementary therapists. To address all facets of a patient's health, each team member offers their knowledge, resulting in complete and all-encompassing treatment.[96]

Challenges and considerations

While synergy and integration offer numerous benefits, challenges still exist (Table 7).[8,96–103] These include issues related to standardization, credentialing of complementary practitioners, insurance coverage, and cultural acceptance of integrative healthcare. Overcoming these challenges requires ongoing dialogue, research, and policy development.[104]

Holistic perspectives on human health and nutrition

The holistic approach to human health provides an all-encompassing framework for attaining comprehensive well-being, grounded in the concept that health transcends mere freedom from illness, embodying a complete state of physical, mental, and emotional equilibrium.[104] For example, TCM has been a successful treatment in case of COVID-19.[97–102,104–108]

Diversity and bioavailability of nutrients

At the heart of holistic nutrition is the variety of nutrients sourced from a broad spectrum of natural foods. This variety is essential, going beyond the simple inclusion of various food groups to include diverse items within each group. Each food contributes a distinct mix of vital nutrients, phytonutrients, and fibers, collectively catering to the body's extensive nutritional requirements. Emphasizing nutrient diversity ensures a diet that is not only balanced but also abundant in all vital elements necessary for sustaining health and averting disease.[105]

Bioavailability, which refers to the body's efficiency in absorbing and utilizing nutrients, is crucial in holistic nutrition. Traditional dietary methods like fermenting, sprouting, and intelligent food combinations greatly boost the bioavailability of nutrients. Fermentation, for example, enhances the presence of beneficial bacteria and certain vitamins, thus improving gut health and the absorption of nutrients. These methods do more than increase nutrient levels; they also make them more accessible to the body.[109]

Significance of specific nutrients in holistic health

Holistic health highlights the vital role of specific nutrients in maintaining overall well-being. The anti-inflammatory qualities of omega-3 fatty acids are well known, as is their role in heart and brain health. Antioxidants found in fruits, vegetables, and nuts also aid in the battle against oxidative stress and reduce the chance of developing chronic illnesses. In addition, essential minerals like magnesium and zinc play critical roles in various bodily processes, including bolstering the immune system and supporting mental health. The holistic view advocates for acquiring these nutrients primarily through a diet based on whole foods, embracing the concept of food as medicine.[106]

Incorporation of traditional natural medicines

In addition to nutrition, traditional natural medicines are key aspects of holistic health. These practices often utilize plant-based treatments, exploiting the healing properties of herbs and botanicals. Examples include the use of turmeric in Ayurvedic medicine for its anti-inflammatory effects and ginseng in TCM for boosting energy and immunity.[43] This blend of age-old wisdom with modern scientific insights offers a comprehensive health and wellness strategy, addressing not just physical issues but also the emotional and spiritual dimensions of health. The holistic approach to health encompasses a wide-ranging understanding of well-being that goes beyond physical health to include mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects.[107] This approach recognizes the deep interconnections between these dimensions, understanding that an imbalance in one can impact the others. For instance, mental factors like chronic stress can manifest as physical problems such as hypertension, exemplifying this interconnectedness. In holistic health, care is tailored to the individual, acknowledging that each person's health journey is distinct. This personalized approach empowers individuals to actively participate in their health care, fostering a deeper connection with their body, lifestyle, and surroundings, and encouraging a sense of responsibility for their health. Prevention is a key element of holistic health, contrasting with conventional medicine's often reactive nature. This approach focuses on maintaining equilibrium and fortifying the body's innate defenses to ward off illnesses and is particularly effective for chronic and lifestyle-related conditions. Holistic health commonly employs natural, gentle healing methods, including dietary changes, herbal therapies, physical activities, and mind-body practices like yoga and meditation.[108] These techniques are generally safer and more harmonious with daily life compared to some traditional medical treatments. The holistic framework is globally inclusive, integrating healing knowledge from diverse cultures. This inclusive nature enriches the practice with varied insights and fosters cultural respect and preservation, adapting ancient healing methods to modern life. Environmental sustainability and consciousness are also central to holistic health. It advocates for organic and local food sources and natural healing methods, benefiting both individual health and the environment. There is a significant focus on mental and emotional health in holistic care. Techniques such as mindfulness and stress reduction address the underlying causes of mental and emotional distress, a critical focus in today's stress-filled world. Holistic health also collaborates with conventional medicine, offering a comprehensive approach to healthcare. This integration combines the latest medical technologies with individualized, natural care for a well-rounded health strategy.[110]

Conclusions

The holistic approach to human health, which seamlessly integrates essential nutrients and traditional natural medicines, stands as a transformative paradigm in healthcare. This approach recognizes that health transcends the mere absence of disease and encompasses the intricate interplay of physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual dimensions. It cherishes the cultural significance and generational wisdom embedded within traditional healing practices, such as TCM and Ayurveda, emphasizing their holistic perspectives on wellness. Moreover, the scientific underpinnings of traditional remedies, as illuminated by studies on bioactive compounds and therapeutic mechanisms, bridge ancient wisdom with modern evidence-based healthcare. The concept of synergy and integration emerges as a cornerstone of this approach, fostering collaboration among diverse healthcare modalities to enhance patient care. To embrace the holistic paradigm fully, it is imperative to address the challenges, such as standardization, credentialing, and insurance coverage, that currently impede its widespread acceptance. Through interdisciplinary research, cultural sensitivity, and patient-centered care, we can embark on a transformative journey toward a future where health is not just the absence of disease but a state of complete well-being, nourished by the wisdom of tradition and the rigor of science.

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Conflict of interest

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