

Crohn's Disease

Complementary/alternative medicine

There are a number of complementary approaches used for treating IBD. These are either therapies not generally recognized by the medical community as standard treatments, or conventional medical approaches which are used to enhance or complement the standard treatments. They may also be called alternative medicines.

- **Evening primrose oil (EPO):** This contains an omega-6 essential fatty acid (which is believed to be its active ingredient) called gamma-linolenic acid. EPO has been studied in a wide variety of disorders, however, high-quality evidence for its use in most conditions is still lacking. EPO may be beneficial for relieving ulcerative colitis symptoms. However there is not enough evidence to support its use for this.
- **Psyllium seeds:** These are found in the plant *Plantaginis ovata*, a native plant of India and Pakistan. A study has compared the use of psyllium seeds to the prescription drug mesalamine in people with UC. It showed that psyllium seeds may be as effective as the medication in decreasing recurrences of the disease. The two can also be used in combination. On the whole however, there is limited and equivocal evidence regarding the use of psyllium in patients with IBD.
- **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM):** TCM practitioners typically use herbs and acupuncture. Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points on the body by a variety of techniques, including the insertion of thin metal needles through the skin. It is intended to remove blockages in qi (the body's "energy flow") and restore and maintain health.
- **Herbs or botanicals** usually contain dozens of bioactive compounds. Shu Gan Wan, Mu Xiang Shun Qi Wan, Xiao Yao Wan are some Chinese herbal formulas that may be used to help reduce the symptoms of ulcerative colitis. However, there is no scientific evidence for these compounds.
- **Be sure to tell your healthcare professional** about any complementary treatments you are using, as they may interfere with drugs described by your physician. If you are using complementary treatments do not stop your IBD medication as herbal remedies are not a substitute.
- **Acupuncture:** Some research suggests that traditional acupuncture can be a safe and effective complement to standard care for Crohn's disease, with acupuncture treatment improving the disease and increasing quality of life and general well being.
- **Fish oils:** There has been a lot of interest in the use of fish oils for the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease. The particular fat found in fish oil is eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) which plays an important role in the production of prostaglandins, which have an effect on inflammation in the body.
- **Bromelain:** This is an enzyme that comes from pineapple stems. Researchers have found that it might be able to reduce inflammation in IBD, although this enzyme has not yet been tested on patients.
- **Aloe vera:** Also known as the "Medicinal Aloe", it is a species of succulent plant that probably originated in Northern Africa, Madagascar and the Arabian Peninsula. It can be used for joint pain. However, there is not enough scientific evidence to support aloe vera for any other uses.
- **Glucosamine:** This is a natural compound found in healthy [cartilage](#). Preliminary research reports improvements with N-acetyl glucosamine (a monosaccharide derivative of glucose) as an added therapy in inflammatory bowel disease. Further scientific evidence is necessary before a formal recommendation can be made.



For more detailed information on some of these topics, please go to [Achieving more with IBD](#).