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# HEALTH BEAT

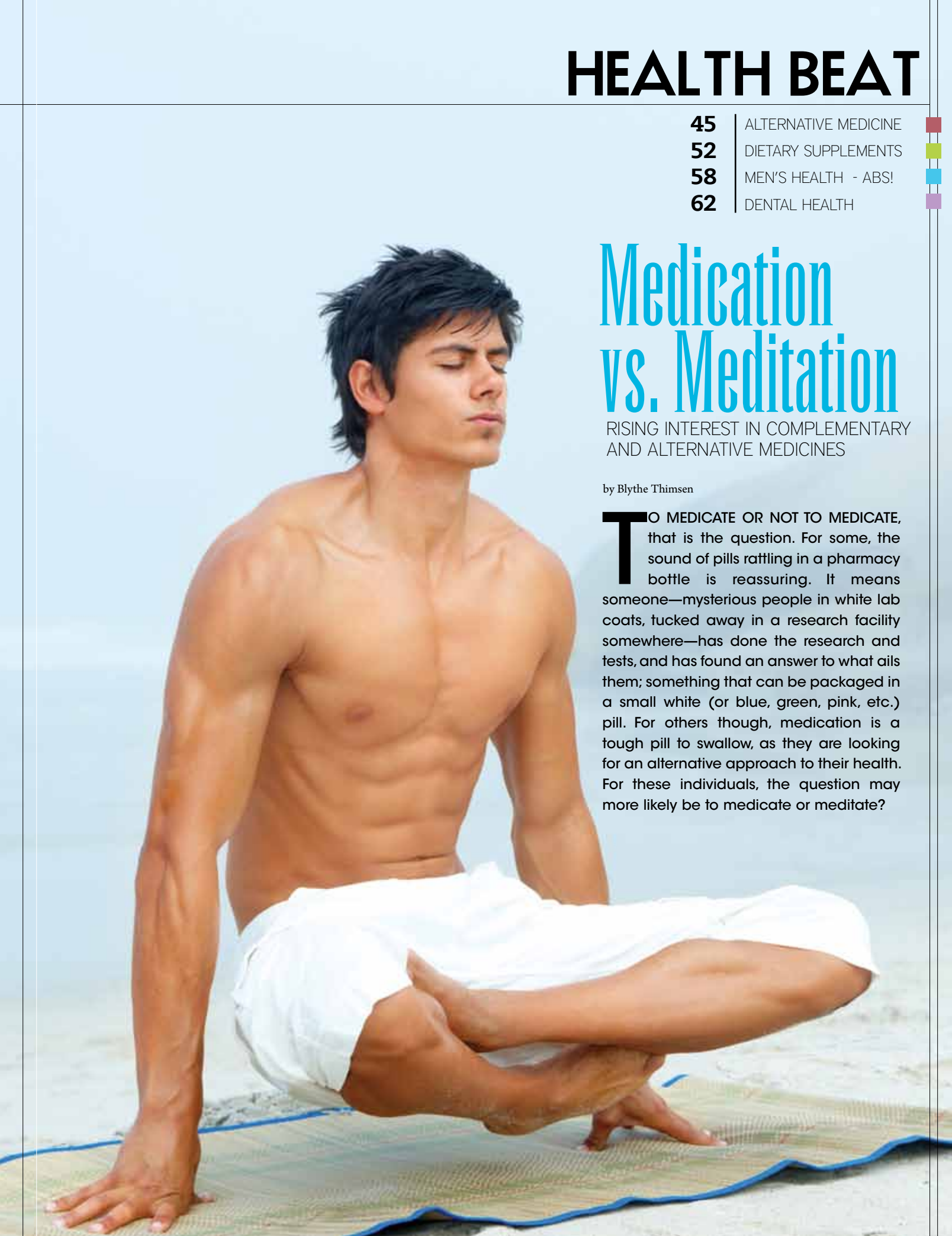
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## Medication vs. Meditation

RIISING INTEREST IN COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES

by Blythe Thimsen

**T**O MEDICATE OR NOT TO MEDICATE, that is the question. For some, the sound of pills rattling in a pharmacy bottle is reassuring. It means someone—mysterious people in white lab coats, tucked away in a research facility somewhere—has done the research and tests, and has found an answer to what ails them; something that can be packaged in a small white (or blue, green, pink, etc.) pill. For others though, medication is a tough pill to swallow, as they are looking for an alternative approach to their health. For these individuals, the question may more likely be to medicate or meditate?



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## HEALTH BEAT | ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), "The 2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)... showed that approximately 38 percent of adults use CAM." It is not just an aversion to pharmaceuticals that is driving people to investigate alternative approaches to their health. Some are looking for a more natural approach to their healthcare, some are concerned about the effect of chemicals on their body and some are interested in alternatives to invasive surgical procedures. Many providers and patients are welcoming the use of alternative medicine as a way to complement their conventional medical care (henceforth, the "complementary" in CAM.)

Alternative medicine has also been mistakenly associated with new age or mystic practices, but it is more accurately defined as "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine."

### HERE IS A BASIC OVERVIEW OF SOME COMMON FORMS OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE.

#### Acupuncture

If your knowledge of acupuncture starts and ends with the image of a human pincushion, it is time to take a closer look at this alternative form of medicine that is becoming increasingly popular. Originating thousands of years ago in China, acupuncture, which involves the insertion of small needles in various points on the body, was meant to rebalance your energy. In modern use as a medical resource, the needles are inserted in specific points in the body to stimulate nerves and muscles, with the idea that it stimulates blood flow and can reduce pain.



*Once upon a time*



*a great smile*

*can make an incredible difference in how the story ends.*

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## HEALTH BEAT | ALTERNATIVE

### Dietary Supplements

Ever taken Echinacea to combat a cold, sipped ginger tea to calm a tumultuous tummy, or heard of St. John's Wort as a resource in fighting depression? These are all dietary supplements that can be used to help treat medical conditions. According to the National Institutes of Health's Office of Dietary Supplements, "As defined by Congress in the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, which became law in 1994, a dietary supplement is a product (other than tobacco) that is intended to supplement the diet; contains one or more dietary ingredients (including vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals, amino acids and other substances) or their constituents; is intended to be taken by mouth as a pill, capsule, tablet or liquid; and is labeled on the front panel as being a dietary supplement."

### Meditation

You can picture it, can't you? The crossed legs, tall posture, thumbs and middle fingers pressed together as the arms are held upward and outward from the body. Throw in an "ummmmm" and you have the quintessential picture of meditation. The practice of meditation needn't look like this, and it is not necessarily a religious experience, though it is often associated with religious traditions, such as those in the monastic lifestyle. Simply taking time to sit, slow your breathing and focus your thoughts for a set amount of time can have a positive impact on your health. Meditation has been shown to lower blood pressure and is used as a resource to naturally lower stress and pain levels.

### Yoga

While yoga could be a subcategory of meditation, thanks to its relaxing and calming benefits, the truth is, there is more to yoga than a groovy mellow feeling. From lowering your blood pressure to helping you sleep, improving your posture and strengthening your immune system, the benefits of yoga continue to grow. In fact, a recent article on NursingDegree.net, listed 77 health benefits

of yoga. With that many benefits, there must be something in the line up that will benefit you personally. If you are looking for an activity that will tone your body, soothe your mood, and may be a healthy boost to your lifestyle, it may be time to break out the Downward Dog, and let the healing begin.

### Spinal Manipulation

For anyone who has never been to a chiropractor, the passion with which friends and family speak of their chiropractors may be baffling. For those who have been in excruciating pain and found relief at the hands of a chiropractor, it makes perfect sense. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, "Chiropractic refers to a system that focuses on the relationship between the body's structure—mainly the spine—and function. Practitioners perform adjustments (also called manipulation) with the goal of correcting structural alignment problems to assist the body in healing." In addition to treating back pain, spinal manipulation is an exciting option for relieving migraines in some people.

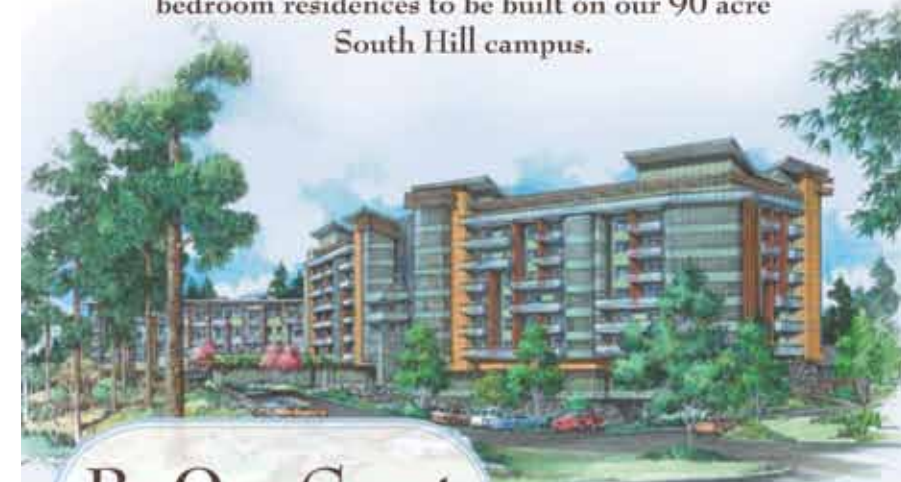
### Massage Therapy

Nothing feels quite as relaxing as a massage, but did you know that pleasure is not the only thing you gain from a little kneading of the tight muscles? How about increased blood flow, reduced stress, eased tension, which can help alleviate depression; and promotion of tissue regeneration for torn or damaged muscles. Local school teacher and junior high basketball coach, Irene Long has been using massage therapy for two years and notices a difference in not just her back, which she injured two years ago playing basketball, but in her overall health. "After I finished my doctor prescribed physical therapy, my physical therapist suggested I seek out massage therapy to help with the pain and healing process," she says. "The results have been spectacular. My back is getting stronger, and when I couple it with the workouts with my trainer, the massage therapy has greatly helped with my recovery process." ■

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