

# ART THERAPY

## FAST FACTS

- In addition to being used for treating mental physical conditions, art therapy has been shown to help reduce everyday stress and increase quality of life.
- To heal the invisible wounds of war such as mild and moderate traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder, the military and VA offer art therapy in many centers such as the National Intrepid Center of Excellence Healing Arts Program.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS ART THERAPY?

Art therapy is a treatment that uses art as the primary mode of expression and communication. An art therapist helps patients use their creativity to reach treatment-related goals. Patients create art as a way to convey or cope with feelings in general or about a specific experience or situation.

Illness can spark intense emotion. Treatments that involve creating art can help manage and communicate those emotions in ways language may not.

You do not have to be “good at art” or an experienced artist to benefit from art therapy!

## What conditions does art therapy treat?

Art therapy is used to treat both physical and mental conditions and address symptoms related to chronic health concerns, including:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma recovery<sup>2</sup>
- Grief and loss treatment
- Addiction recovery<sup>3</sup>
- Depression<sup>4</sup>
- Panic disorder
- Anxiety
- Asthma<sup>5</sup>
- Neurodegenerative diseases
- Undesired behavior

## Art therapy and cancer

Art therapy can help relieve anxiety, depression, and emotional distress in cancer patients.

- A study published in the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management found that art therapy was effective for improving mood and reducing anxiety and depression in cancer patients.<sup>6</sup>
- During active cancer treatment, like chemotherapy or radiation, the ability to freely express thoughts, fears, and emotions through an open creative process seems particularly valuable during active cancer treatment.<sup>7</sup> Art therapy can help restore self-image and identity after cancer treatment.<sup>8</sup>

## What can I expect to happen during art therapy?

Although art therapists are trained to treat a number of different psychological or emotional issues, some therapists will specialize in certain conditions. Confirm that your therapist is equipped to address your particular concern.

Art therapy can be done in groups or in individual sessions. Before you seek treatment, make sure that you are choosing what you or a trusted healthcare practitioner believes will work best for you.

## Is there evidence that art therapy works?

In the last 25 years, as more people have added art therapy to their treatment plans, more and more research has been published on its positive impact for treating certain conditions. For example, one large review study found that there is moderately good evidence that art therapy helps improve quality of life and lower anxiety and depression, especially in women.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, art therapy has been used in community settings to help improve the quality of life of people living with long-term illnesses and conditions. An 8-week study found it helped physical and mental health as well as people’s sense of well-being.<sup>10</sup>

## Are there precautions, side effects or safety concerns I should know about?

Art therapy is widely considered a safe way of addressing physical and mental symptoms of cancer and other conditions when delivered by a well-trained certified art therapist. Any form of therapy can bring up uncomfortable emotion and cause you to experience some mental and emotional discomfort. Reliving traumatic experiences is difficult and if it isn't handled correctly can negatively affect your emotional and physical health. Talk with your doctor about whether art therapy is right for you and where to find a therapist or program.

## What training, certifications or licensing does an art therapist need?

In the United States, there is no single set of guidelines and certifications required to practice art therapy. However, there are some licensing guidelines and education requirements you can check to see if an art therapist is well qualified.

### License Guidelines

- Art therapy is regulated in 15 states plus the District of Columbia. Requirements vary by the state in which the therapist is practicing.
- Typically, art therapists are licensed as an art therapist, creative art therapist, or professional or mental health counselor. To find your state's current licensing requirements, visit [arttherapy.org/state-advocacy](http://arttherapy.org/state-advocacy)

### Education Requirements

To be recognized as an art therapist, someone must complete graduate level education in art therapy or a related counseling or psychological field. The American Art Therapy Association also requires that students complete certain courses during their graduate program in order to apply for licensure. To find more information on recognized graduate programs and the courses art therapists are required to take, visit [arttherapy.org/educational-standards](http://arttherapy.org/educational-standards)

### Board Certification and Registration

Currently, the American Art Therapy Association oversees and certifies the registration of art therapists. In order to be registered, a therapist must have completed a graduate program in art therapy from an accredited university, completed an internship or clinic hours supervised by a professional clinician and pass a nationally recognized exam. To learn more about the certification process, visit [www.atcb.org/Public/AboutTheCredentials](http://www.atcb.org/Public/AboutTheCredentials)

## How do I find an art therapist?

The best place to locate a certified art therapist who meets the requirements of the American Art Therapy Association is to visit [arttherapy.org/art-therapist-locator](http://arttherapy.org/art-therapist-locator)

## Will my insurance company cover the cost of seeing an art therapist?

Someone who is only listed as an art therapist may not be covered under your insurance policy. Whether your insurance company covers art therapy mostly depends on your therapist's training, license and how your state classifies art therapy as a profession.

- Some insurance companies will cover treatment and recognize the services of therapists trained in services that go along with the art therapy, such as traditional counseling services.

## Should I tell my primary care physician that I am seeing an art therapist?

Yes. Let your primary care doctor and any other health care providers know that you would like to include art therapy in your treatment.

## My notes and questions

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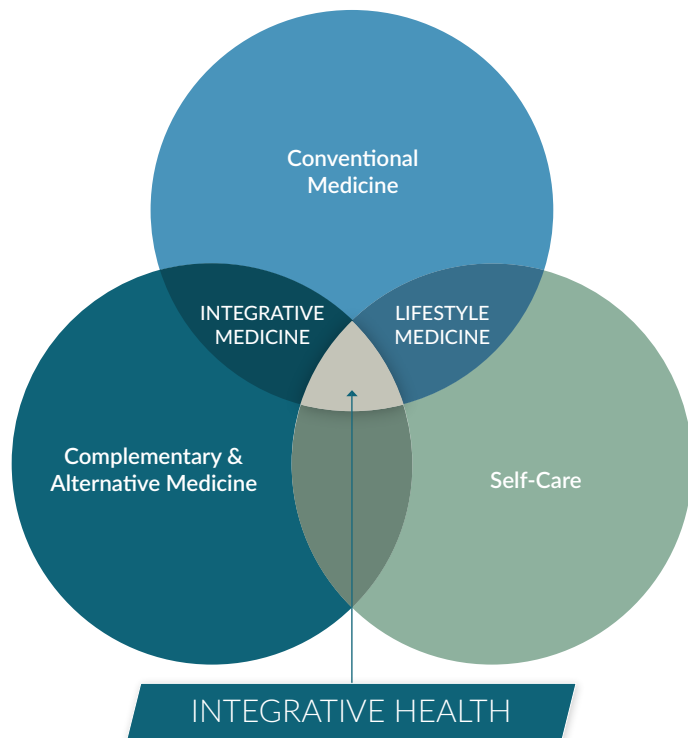
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