

# The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Among Colorectal Cancer Patients

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## Introduction

**Background:** Colorectal cancer (CRC) is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in both the United States and Louisiana. The conventional route of care for colorectal cancer is surgery and therapies including radiation, immune, and chemo depending on the stage of cancer. Other options for care fall under complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

**What is CAM?** Complementary and alternative medicine(CAM) refers to any medical practices or beliefs that are outside of standard conventional practices and beliefs.

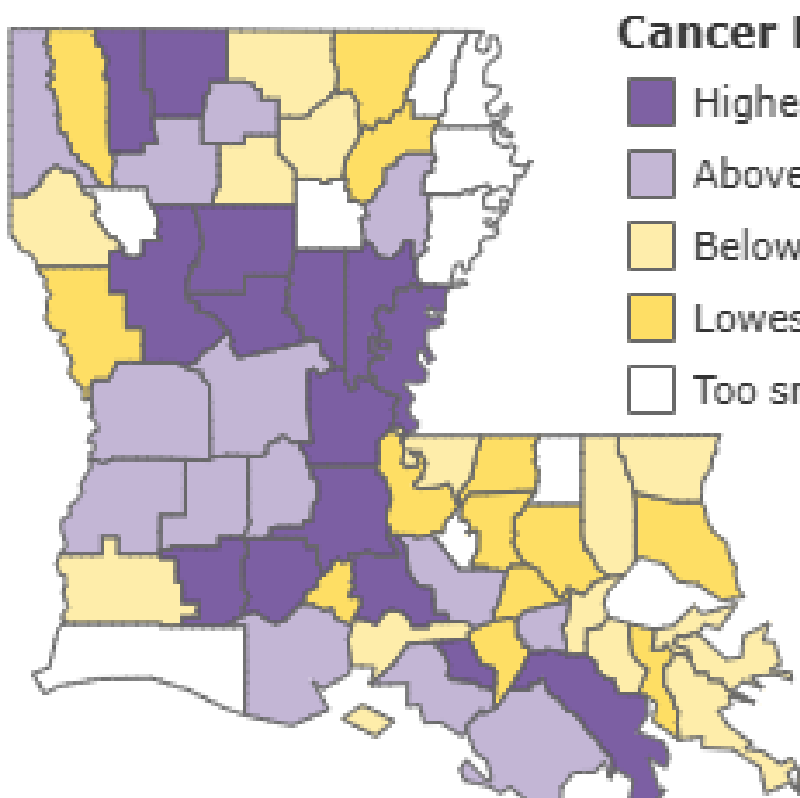
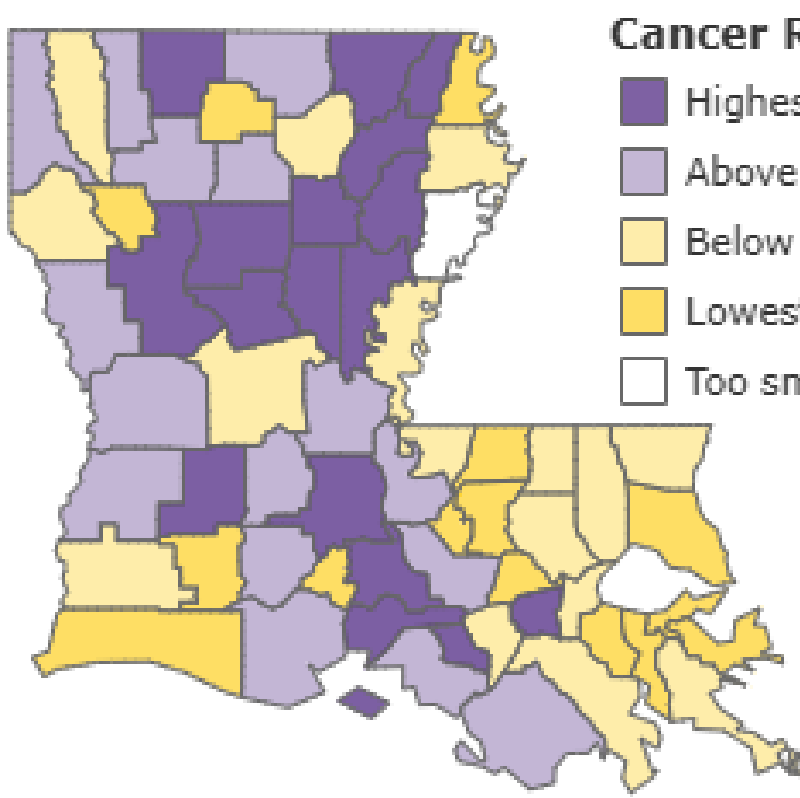
**Why is this important?** Some CAM modalities may be beneficial for CRC by keeping the body healthy and managing side effects of cancer and treatment

**Objective:** To explore if and why individuals diagnosed with CRC used CAM in the past 12 months.

**Figure 1:** Display of CRC incidence and mortality rates by parish in Louisiana.

Incidence Rates

Mortality Rates



## Methods

**Data:** National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

**Sample:** Adults ever diagnosed with colon (n= 537,263) or rectal cancer (n= 55,836).

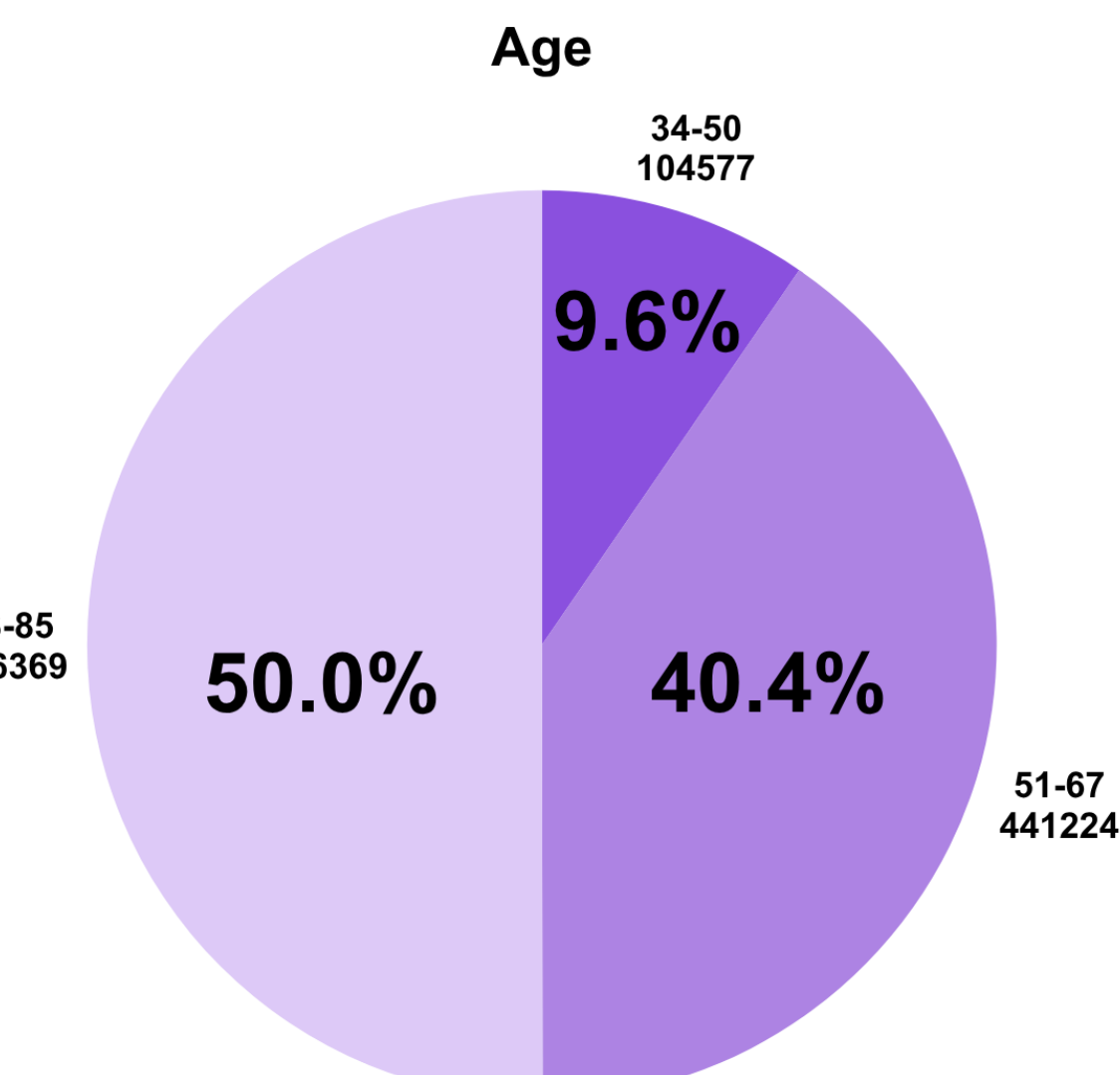
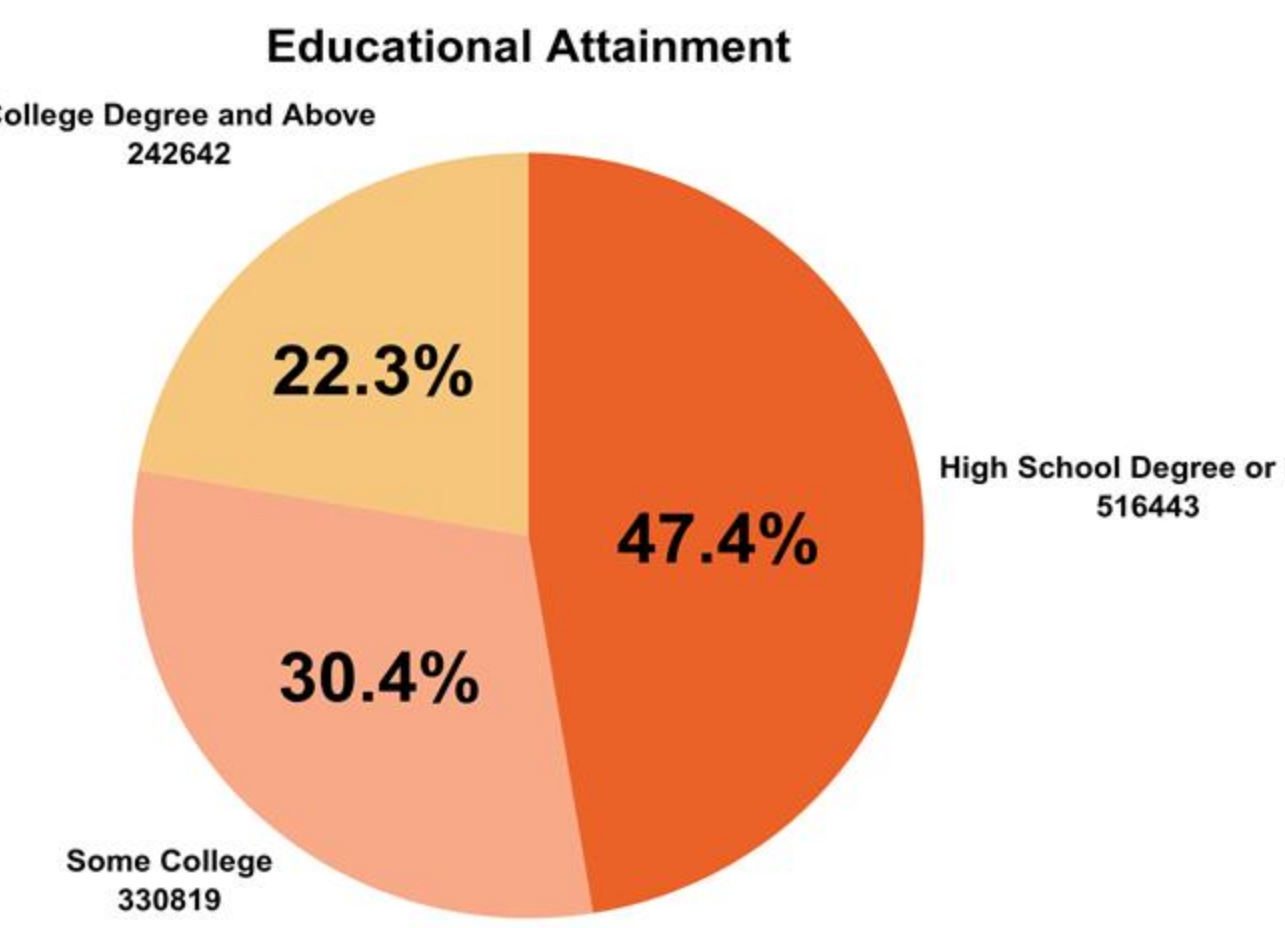
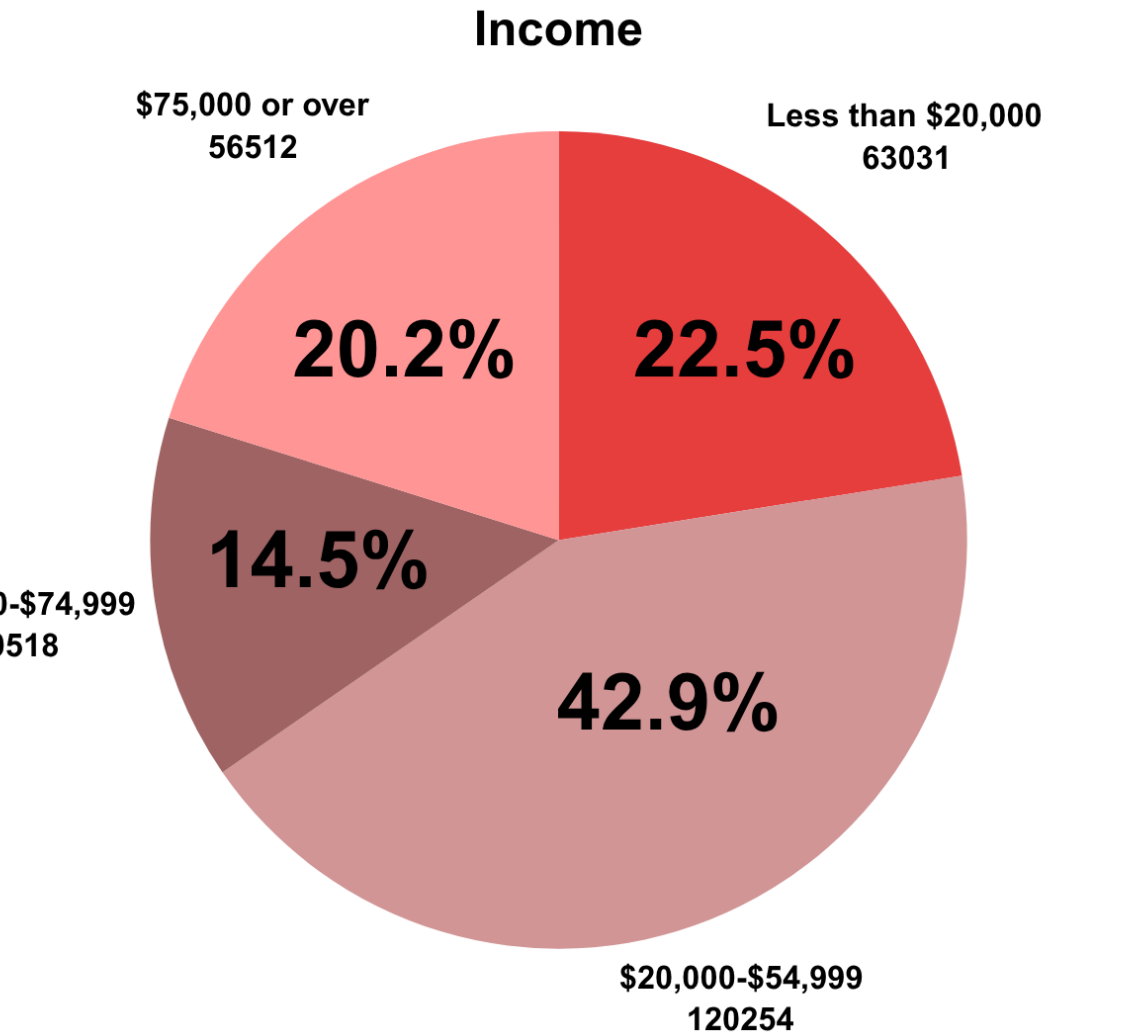
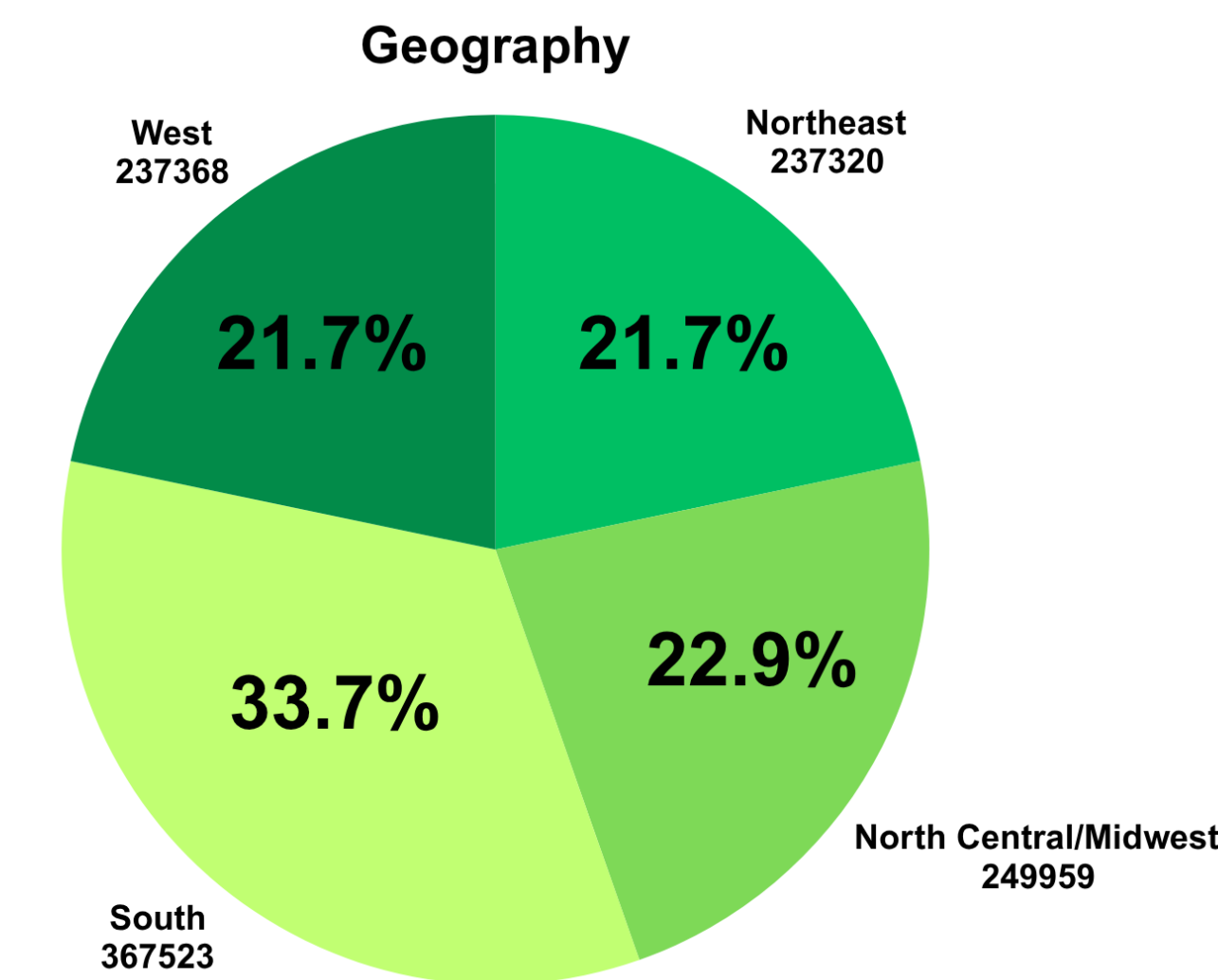
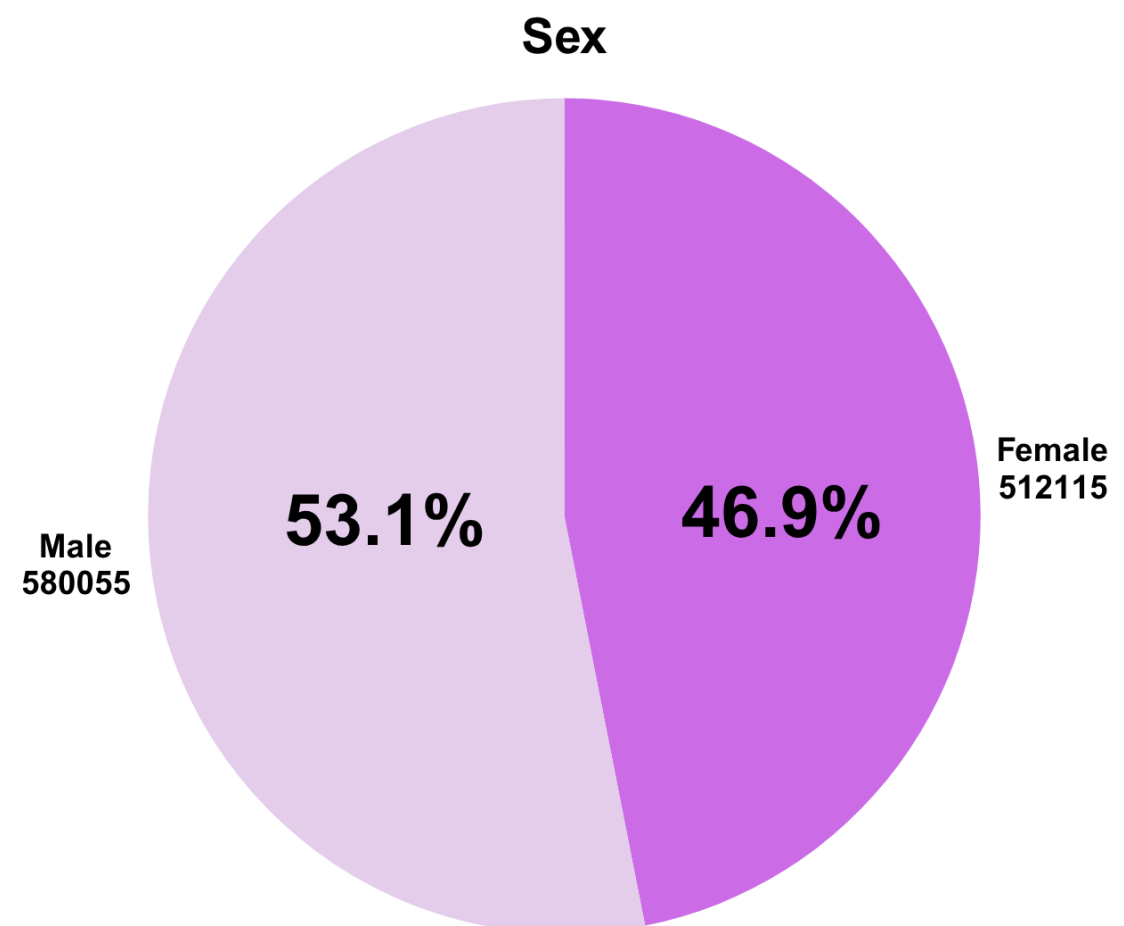
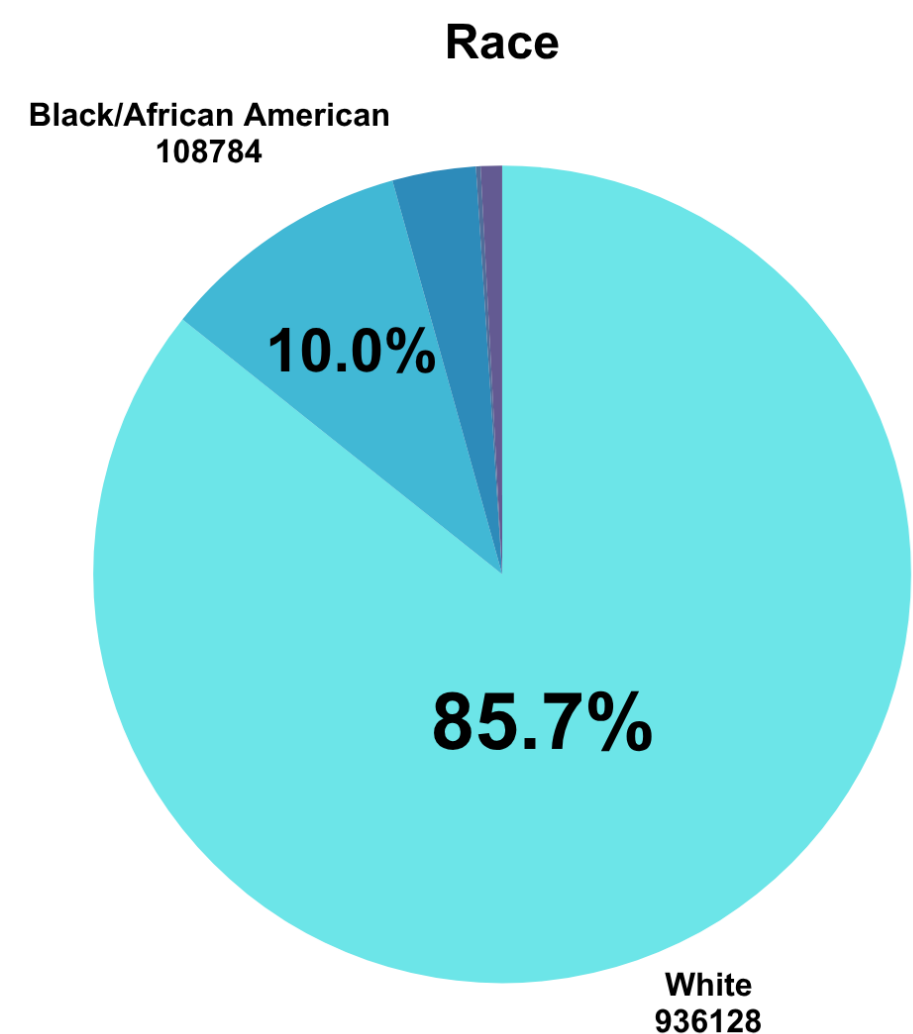
**Outcome:** Those who used CAM within the past 12 months; if yes, reason for CAM use.

**Demographic characteristics of the study sample:** Age, race, sex, income, location, and education level

**Analysis:** Survey question were analyzed for overall frequencies and cross-tabulated to explore the prevalence of CAM use among those diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

## Results

**Figure 2:** Demographic characteristics of the study sample



**Table 1:** List of CAM included in the 2012 NHIS

Alternative Medical Systems	Biologically Based Therapies	Manipulative and Body Based Therapies	Mind-Body Therapies
Acupuncture	Chelation Therapy	Chiropractic Manipulation or Osteopathic Manipulation	Yoga
Naturopathy	Vitamin		Qi Gong
Homeopathic Treatment	Minerals	Craniosacral Therapy	Tai Chi
Ayurveda	Herbal Supplements	Massage	Energy Healing Therapy
Traditional Healers:	Bio Feedback	Movement Technique:	Hypnosis
• <i>Curandero, Machi or Parchero</i>	Special Diet:	• <i>Feldenkreis</i>	Relaxation Technique:
• <i>Native American Healer</i>	• <i>Vegetarian</i>	• <i>Pilates</i>	• <i>Progressive Relaxation</i>
• <i>Medicine Shaman</i>	• <i>Macrobiotic Diet</i>	• <i>Trager Psychological Integration</i>	• <i>Guided Imagery</i>
• <i>Hierbero or Yerbero</i>	• <i>Atkins Diet</i>	• <i>Alexander Technique</i>	• <i>Mantra Meditation</i>
	• <i>Pritikin Diet</i>		• <i>Spiritual Meditation</i>
	• <i>Ornish Diet</i>		• <i>Mindfulness Meditation</i>
• <i>Huesero</i>			

**Table 2:** List of all CAM used by colorectal cancer patients and the possible reasons for use

Used CAM Modalities	Colon Cancer	Rectal Cancer
<b>Special Diet</b>		
For improved immune function	0.4%	6.5%
Because HC provider recommended	1.4%	6.5%
For enhanced energy	2.4%	6.5%
Because family or friends recommended	0%	6.5%
<b>For general wellness</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>
To treat cancer	0.8%	0%
<b>1st Herbal Supplement</b>		
For improved immune function	8.1%	0%
Because HC provider recommended	9.4%	0%
For enhanced energy	6.2%	0%
Because family or friends recommended	7.5%	0%
<b>For general wellness</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
To treat cancer	1.1%	0%
<b>2nd Herbal Supplement</b>		
For improved immune function	2.8%	0%
Because HC provider recommended	2.6%	0%
For enhanced energy	0.9%	0%
Because family or friends recommended	4.1%	0%
<b>For general wellness</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	0%
To treat cancer	1.3%	0%
<b>Massage</b>		
For improved immune function	0.8%	0%
<b>Because HC provider recommended</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	0%
For enhanced energy	0.8%	2.6%
Because family or friends recommended	0%	2.6%
For general wellness	1.7%	2.6%
To treat cancer	0%	0%
<b>Naturopathy</b>		
For improved immune function	0.8%	0%
Because HC provider recommended	0%	0%
For enhanced energy	0%	0%
<b>Because family or friends recommended</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	0%
For general wellness	0.8%	0%
To treat cancer	0.8%	0%
<b>Relaxation Technique</b>		
For improved immune function	0.1%	6.5%
Because HC provider recommended	0%	0%
For enhanced energy	0.1%	6.5%
Because family or friends recommended	0.8%	6.5%
<b>For general wellness</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>
To treat cancer	0.9%	0%
<b>Yoga</b>		
For improved immune function	0.8%	6.5%
Because HC provider recommended	0%	0%
<b>For enhanced energy</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	0%
Because family or friends recommended	0.6%	6.5%
For general wellness	2.7%	6.5%
To treat cancer	0%	0%

## Conclusion

Herbal supplements, vitamins and minerals, and special diet were the CAM modalities used the most by colorectal cancer patients. The main reasonings for use can be summarized under patients trying to keep themselves healthy and strong.

**Next Steps:** Primary data collection looking at whether CAM was used before CRC diagnosis or because of the CRC diagnosis. This would explore if CRC patients found CAM beneficial or if it was already apart of their lifestyle before diagnosis.

**References:** Kvakova, M., Kamlarova, A., Stefllova, J., Benetinova, V., & Bertkova, I. (2022). Probiotics and postbiotics in colorectal cancer: Prevention and complementary therapy. *World Journal of Gastroenterology*, 28(27), 3370–3382. <https://doi.org/10.3748/wjg.v28.i27.3370>. Louisiana Tumor Registry. (n.d.). *Public Health*. Retrieved July 21, 2025, from <https://sph.lsuhscc.edu/louisiana-tumor-registry/>. *Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)—NCI* (nciglobal.ncicenterprise). (1980, January 1). [cgvArticle]. <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam>