Complementary therapies

This information sheet describes how complementary therapies evolved and why they may be beneficial for some people with motor neurone disease (MND) and their carers.

Complementary therapies are a combination of aspects from many traditional Medicines.

Many of the origins of complementary therapies lie with other societies or cultures than our own. Some date back hundreds and even thousands of years and are becoming more widely accepted as having potential benefits, especially when used together with conventional treatments.

They are becoming increasingly available on the NHS, with many general practices providing access to complementary therapy.

Many people living with MND are now finding that some use of complementary therapies can help to reduce stress and discomfort, which may alleviate certain symptoms.

The MND Association would like to point out that it does not specifically recommend any of the complementary therapies mentioned in this information sheet, but it does accept that some people affected by MND may find them beneficial for some types of symptom control.

Note: Before considering any of the alternative therapies available, it is important to talk to your GP first, to check they won’t adversely affect any current treatment programme. It is also important to receive any additional therapy from an experienced registered practitioner. Details of qualified practitioners can be obtained by contacting the relevant telephone numbers given in the ‘Other organisations’ section of this information sheet.
Complementary therapy offers a different approach to more traditional methods – usually involving the body, mind and spirit. This holistic approach may, for some, lead to feeling ‘more in control’ of the situation.

It is generally thought that relaxation can help to reduce anxiety and stress, which can be brought on by many of the problems associated with everyday living for people with MND and their caregivers. Complementary therapies may provide some people with relief from symptoms associated with:

- Tension/Stress
- Anxiety/panic attacks
- Depression
- Pain
- Musculoskeletal problems
- Breathlessness
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Hot flushes
- Sleeplessness/fatigue

Guidelines (for practitioners)

All practitioners of complementary therapies are advised to ensure they are registered with a professional organisation that ensures its members are properly qualified, insured to practice and are committed to continual professional development.

Therapists should have a basic understanding of the clinical issues with which they may be faced when providing therapy to someone with MND. These may include:

- Problems with speech and communication
- Fatigue
- PEG feeding (feeding through a tube into the stomach)
- Breathing problems *(please note: some essential oils have contra-indications for respiratory dysfunction)*
- Muscle spasms
- Muscle weakness
• Impaired use of legs, arms and hands
• Pain

Therapists should also be aware of any medication being taken by someone with MND, to avoid conflicts with the therapy they may be providing.

The following sections provide general definitions for a variety of complementary therapies. If you require more detail, or information on a therapy not covered here, please refer to the organizations listed in the section on ‘Other organisations’ later in this sheet, who may be able to direct you to a qualified practitioner for the specific therapy.

**Acupuncture**

Acupuncture is part of traditional Chinese medicine, which has been in existence for over 5,000 years. It is based on the theory that energy flows through channels in the body known as meridians. The therapy is designed to work with the whole body, instead of just the symptoms, by accessing these channels.

To maintain a positive state of health, practitioners believe this energy must flow freely and evenly and must be in balance. If the flow is blocked, the body can experience stress.

During an acupuncture session, fine needles are inserted into the channels. This technique is thought to help stimulate the flow of energy, resulting in increased energy and vitality, greater enjoyment of life and more restful sleep.

Each therapy session should be focused on the individual’s distinct requirements. Medical history should be discussed and lifestyle and diet taken into consideration before any course is started.

**Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy is believed to offer effective muscle relaxation, improved blood and lymphatic circulation and support with pain relief.

Essential oils are often used with massage. The aromatic fragrances hit nerve receptors as they enter the nose and are thought to stimulate parts of the brain which are linked to feelings and emotions, helping to lift the spirits and create a sense of well being.

Aromatherapy oils can also be used as bath oils, but never use these undiluted.

Many of the essential oils suggested for use in aromatherapy massage have been found beneficial by people with MND. However, as the symptoms of
MND differ widely with each individual, a medical history should be taken before the session begins.

To find out which aromatherapy oils are suitable for specific requirements, please consult an accredited Aromatherapist. Essential oils should only be used after consultation with an accredited Aromatherapist.

Homeopathy

The objective of homeopathy is to alleviate illness or conditions by stimulating the body’s own natural healing processes. Homeopathy can be applied to the symptoms of many illnesses, as well as causes. As people can present varying symptoms, separate remedies may be used for the same condition or illness for different individuals.

It is essential that a qualified homeopath be consulted, as their first task is to identify which remedies may work for the individual involved.

Note: it is important that you consult your doctor before taking any homeopathic remedy to ensure there is no conflict with any other medication you may be taking.

Hypnotherapy

Therapists use hypnosis to create a self-induced state of deep relaxation in their patients. Their aim is to trigger the body’s self-healing processes using the subconscious mind.

Many emotional problems are often tackled with hypnotherapy, including fears, phobias, stress, panic, sleep problems and anxiety.

Although the patient remains aware of the surroundings, the deep level of relaxation should enable the hypnotherapist to ‘suggest’ to the subconscious how to respond to certain problems, which may help to relieve stress and alleviate pain.

Hypnotherapy is only effective if the subject is committed to relaxing and has an open mind receptive to the therapist.

Massage

Massage is a relaxing and enjoyable way to assist with the correction of a broad range of physical problems.

It can help to:

- Improve muscle tone
- Correct structural imbalance
• Assist circulation and aid the removal of waste products (which can be toxic to the body)

• Encourage the release of endorphins (the body’s natural painkillers)

• Assist the respiratory system by improving lung capacity.

Massage is also extremely relaxing which can help to reduce tension and promote general health. Discuss the different types of massage with the masseur to determine which would be most beneficial.

Meditation

Meditation techniques are believed to encourage simple healing and spiritual growth. More recently it has become a valuable tool for relaxation and stress relief. It is thought to be effective for healing purposes, emotional cleansing and balancing, concentration and insight.

Reiki

Reiki is a system of natural healing, which is thought to recharge, realign and rebalance energy in the body.

The practice of Reiki is based on channelling energy. This energy, referred to as ‘chi’, is thought to flow through channels running the entire length of the body. By harmonising this energy system, the body is better able to heal itself on all levels, eg physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

In its simplest form, the Reiki practitioner places their hands on the recipient, to encourage Reiki energy to flow. The ultimate goal is to induce natural healing within the body.

Reflexology

The art of reflexology is thought to be about 5,000 years old and originates from China and Egypt. Its theory suggests that congestion or tension in any part of the foot mirrors a corresponding problem in another part of the body.

Foot reflexology uses ‘pressure therapy’ and involves applying focused pressure to known points located in the foot, which relate to specific areas in the body.

Nerve endings embedded in the feet connect to all areas of the body through the spinal cord. Stimulation of these nerve endings may help to promote relaxation, stimulate vital organs and encourage the natural healing processes of the body.

Reflexology may help some people find relief from stress, constipation, tension, headaches and problems with circulation.
Other organizations

See also the ‘Related references’ section near the end of this sheet.

Recommendations for therapists can sometimes be obtained from health centres, a local hospice or GP surgeries. If not, the following organizations may be useful.

Please note that the MND Association does not necessarily endorse any of the organisations listed here, but has included them to indicate the types of assistance available.

The Association of Reflexologists
The Association of Reflexologists provides a website search facility to find an appropriate reflexologist in your local area.

The Association of Reflexologists
5 Fore Street, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1HX
Telephone: 01823 351010
Email info@aor.org.uk
Website www.aor.org.uk

The British Acupuncture Council
The council provides information on local registered specialists.

The British Acupuncture Council
63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9HQ
Telephone: 020 8735 0400
Email info@acupuncture.org.uk
Website www.acupuncture.org.uk

The British Homeopathic Association
They provide a website search facility to find practitioners in your local area.

British Homeopathic Association
Hahnemann House, 29 Park Street West, Luton LU1 3BE
Telephone: 01582 408675
Email: info@britishhomeopathic.org
Website: www.britishhomeopathic.org

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
Contact this association for advice about hypnotherapists in the UK.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BACP House, 15 St John’s Business Park, Lutterworth
Leicestershire LE17 4HB
Telephone: 01455 883300
Helpline: 01455 883316
Email bacp@bacp.co.uk
Website www.bacp.co.uk
The Complementary Therapists Association
The Complementary Therapists Association offer advice about qualified practitioners and may be able to provide answers to specific therapy questions.

The Complementary Therapists Association
2nd floor, Chiswick Gate, 598-608 Chiswick High Road, London, W4 5RT
Telephone: 0845 202 2941
Email: info@ctha.com
Website: www.igpp.co.uk

Hypnotherapy Directory
This organisation offers a list of qualified professional hypnotherapists.

Hypnotherapy Directory
Manor Coach House, Church Hill, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4RQ
Telephone: 0844 8030 242
Email: through the website contact page
Website: www.hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk/

The International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists
Contact this federation for details and locations of registered practitioners in aromatherapy.

IFPA
82 Ashby Road, Hinckley, Leicestershire LE10 1SN
Telephone: 01455 637987
Email: admin@ifparoma.org
Website: www.ifparoma.org

The Institute for Complementary and Natural Medicine and the British Register of Complementary Practitioners (BRCP)
The Institute for Complementary and Natural Medicine (ICNM) can advise on safe and best practice of complementary medicine with information on practitioners. They administer the multi-disciplinary register BRCP, which consists of professional practitioners and therapists who have provided evidence of their individual competence to practice.

ICNM
Can-Mezzanine, 32-36 Loman Street, LONDON SE1 0EH
Telephone: 0207 922 7980
Email: info@icnm.org.uk
Website: www.icnm.org.uk

Related references

Healthwork UK: National occupational standards for aromatherapy 2002
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Further information

If you have any questions about the information on this sheet, please contact the MND Connect team.

Downloads of all our information sheets and most of our publications are available from our website. You can also order our publications direct from the MND Connect team, who will also be able to advise on individual needs:

MND Connect
MND Association, PO Box 246, Northampton NN1 2PR
Telephone: 08457 626262
Fax: (01604) 638289
Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

MND Association website and online forum
Website: www.mndassociation.org
Online forum: http://forum.mndassociation.org/ or through the website

We welcome your views

Your feedback is really important to us, as it helps improve our information for the benefit of people living with MND and those who care for them.

If you would like to provide feedback on any of our information sheets, you can access an online form at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/infosheets_1-25
Or request a paper version by email: infofeedback@mndassociation.org

Or write to:
Information feedback
MND Association
PO Box 246
Northampton NN1 2PR

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