



6B

Complementary therapies

Information for people with or affected by motor neurone disease, or Kennedy's disease

This information sheet describes a range of complementary therapies and why they may be beneficial for some people with motor neurone disease (MND) and their carers. If you are living with Kennedy's disease, you may have similar symptoms and find this sheet helpful.

The content includes the following sections:

- 1: What are complementary therapies?**
- 2: What types of complementary therapy are available?**
- 3: What are the guidelines for therapists?**
- 4: Are there conventional therapies I can use?**
- 5: How do I find out more?**

Get advice from your GP or consultant before trying any complementary therapies to ensure they are suitable for you and will not affect any treatment you are receiving.

All therapy should be provided by an experienced, registered therapist.
See section 3: *What are the guidelines for therapists?*

 This symbol is used to highlight **our other publications**. To find out how to access these, see *Further information* at the end of this sheet.

 This symbol is used to highlight **quotes** from other people with or affected by MND.

This information has been evidenced, user tested and reviewed by experts.

1: What are complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies are non-medical treatments that can be used alongside conventional treatments (treatments widely used by health and social care professionals). With MND, they may help ease some symptoms, but will not stop or slow down the disease.

The MND Association does not necessarily recommend the complementary therapies mentioned in this information sheet. However, some people may find them helpful for symptom relief and to promote a sense of wellbeing.

How much do they cost?

Some therapies may be available on the NHS, so ask your GP what is available in your area. Therapies may be available to you for free, depending on the guidelines in your area. Many local hospices provide complementary therapies as part of their services. A hospice can provide palliative care from diagnosis, so it is worth checking what is available early on.



For more information about hospices, see:
Information sheet 3D – *Hospice and palliative care*

If you need to pay for therapy, ask for the price before booking, as costs can vary. Some therapies may be expensive, particularly if they are used long-term. The MND Association may be able to provide a support grant towards the cost of complementary therapy. See *Further information* at the end of this sheet for contact details.

How can they help me?

Many people living with MND find that complementary therapies can help to relieve symptoms, such as:

- tension, depression and anxiety
- problems with the muscles and skeleton
- pain
- breathlessness
- constipation
- sleeplessness and fatigue.



See our guide *Emotional and psychological support*, for ways to find emotional support after an MND diagnosis

2: What types of complementary therapy are available?

A variety of therapies are available, some of which are listed below.

See section 5: *How do I find out more?* for organisations that can direct you to a wider range of therapies with registered therapists.

Ask your GP and the relevant therapist to ensure a therapy is suitable for you and your symptoms.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is based on the theory that energy flows through channels in the body, known as meridians. This energy should flow freely and evenly and must be in balance. It is believed the body can experience stress if the flow is blocked.

During an acupuncture session, fine needles are inserted into points on the body where channels are thought to be, to stimulate the flow of energy.

Acupuncture therapists believe this can help with a range of symptoms including pain and problems with sleeping. Your medical history is taken at the first session.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy uses a variety of plant based essential oils applied to the skin in a carrier oil or base cream, through inhalation or by adding to a bath to stimulate parts of the brain linked to feelings and emotions. This is believed to relax the muscles, improve circulation and relieve pain.

These aromatic oils are often used with massage. This can improve mood and create a sense of wellbeing.

Essential oils should only be used after consultation with a registered aromatherapist. Some oils are not suitable for people with breathing problems or other conditions. A medical history should be taken before the session begins.

Art therapy

This therapy uses art to help people express themselves freely and address emotional issues which may feel difficult using words. Art therapy may be facilitated by an art psychotherapist, who will listen to you and help you to make sense of how you are feeling.

No art skills are needed to take part. The aim is not to produce a work of art, but to use your creativity to explore the way you feel.

Your therapist will help you think about what you have created. This can help you come to terms with difficult emotions you may be experiencing.

Hypnotherapy

Therapists use hypnosis to create a state of deep relaxation in their patients. This enables the hypnotherapist to 'suggest' to the subconscious mind how to respond to certain problems or situations. You remain aware and awake throughout the session.

A range of emotional problems can be tackled with hypnotherapy, including fears, phobias, stress, panic, sleep problems and anxiety.

Massage

Massage involves the therapist manipulating the soft tissue areas of the body using different techniques which may help to relieve tension and improve circulation. The therapist may apply pressure using their hands, elbows, feet or specialist massage equipment.

Massage is believed to ease pain and give an overall sense of wellbeing. If you have difficulty getting onto a massage table or removing items of clothing, let the therapist know and they may be able to adapt the massage to suit your needs.

Meditation

Meditation techniques involve focusing the mind and visualising sounds, objects, feelings or places. This is believed to train the mind, promote relaxation and relieve stress.

There are many types of meditation. Guided meditation involves someone talking you through the meditation to help you relax. This can be in person or through a recording. Some forms of meditation include chanting or breathing techniques.

Music therapy

This therapy uses music to improve emotional wellbeing. Both the therapist and the person receiving therapy use musical instruments, voice and rhythm to express themselves and communicate.

It is thought to improve emotional wellbeing by increasing your sense of self-awareness and allowing you to express yourself without the need for words. You do not need musical skills to participate in music therapy.

Reiki

The practice of Reiki is based on channeling energy, which is thought to flow through the body. By balancing this energy system, it is believed the body is better able to balance itself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

In its simplest form, the Reiki practitioner places their hands on or above different areas of your body to encourage energy to flow. This is sometimes called hands-on healing. The goal is to restore balance within the body. You may experience sensations of heat, visualize colours or experience a sense of peace.

Reflexology

Reflexology applies pressure to known points on the feet, which are believed to link to specific areas of the body. This may help to bring about balance through improving circulation and reducing toxins.

Hands, ears and face may also be included in a reflexology sequence.

Reflexology may offer relief from stress, constipation, tension, headaches and problems with circulation.



“A reflexologist kindly massages my feet, hands and arms, which helps with circulation and generally feels good. These appointments were facilitated by the local hospital.”

Shiatsu and Acupressure

Like acupuncture, these therapies are based on the theory that energy flows through channels in the body known as meridians. However, rather than using needles, the therapist uses fingers, elbows or other instruments to gently massage and apply pressure to the meridians to clear any blockages. These therapies may relieve tension, pain and circulation problems.

Therapies involving movement

Some complementary therapies involve movement or exercise. Discuss what’s expected with the provider in advance to see if the activity will be suitable for you.

For example, excessive exercise is not advised with MND. There may be risk of falling, muscle strain or over-exerting yourself. Get advice from your GP before attempting these therapies.

Examples of these therapies include:

- Alexander technique
- dance therapy
- kinesiology
- Pilates
- tai-chi
- yoga.

See section 5: *How do I find out more?* to find a practitioner if you feel these therapies may be of use to you.

3: What are the guidelines for therapists?

Therapists are advised to register with a professional body that ensures its members are properly qualified and have insurance to practice.

The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) is a voluntary regulator that was set up with government support to provide a register of therapists who have met national standards. The register has been approved by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care.

See section 5: *How do I find out more?* for contact details and other professional bodies who hold lists of professionally qualified, registered therapists.

It is important that therapists are aware of how MND affects you. Let them know if you have any problems with:

- speech and communication
- fatigue
- eating and drinking (or tube feeding)
- breathing (some essential oils are not suitable for people with breathing problems)
- muscle spasms or weakness
- mobility and movement
- involuntary movements
- pain.

Also let them know if you are taking any medications.

4: What other therapies could I try?

Other techniques and conventional therapies are used by health and social care professionals. This section gives examples of these, but they should always be provided by a qualified practitioner.

Hydrotherapy

This therapy involves doing specific exercises in a pool of warm water with a qualified physiotherapist. Your body weight is supported by the water, which helps relieve pain and allows you to move more freely. The warmth of the water helps to relax and ease the joints and muscles.


 For more details about hydrotherapy, see:
Information sheet 6A – *Physiotherapy*

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy involves exercise to maintain muscles that have not been affected by MND, improve flexibility and help prevent stiffness and pain. The therapy may include assisted or 'passive' exercises where the therapist moves your limbs.

A carer can be shown how to provide support for an assisted or passive exercise programme by your physiotherapist. This means you can follow the course of physiotherapy between appointments.

Excessive exercise is not advised with MND and can cause fatigue, so always get individual advice from a qualified physiotherapist with experience of MND.

 For more details about physiotherapy, see:
Information sheet 6A – *Physiotherapy*

5: How do I find out more?

Useful organisations

We do not necessarily endorse any of the following organisations but have included them to help you begin your search for further information.

The contact details are correct at the time of print but may change between revisions. If you need help to find an organisation, contact our MND Connect helpline (see *Further information* at the end of this sheet for details).

The Association of Reflexologists

Provides a website search facility to find an appropriate reflexologist in your local area.

Address: Victoria House, Victoria Street, Taunton, Somerset TA1 3FA

Telephone: 01823 351010

Email: info@aor.org.uk

Website **www.aor.org.uk**

www.aor.org.uk/custom/far-search (to find a reflexologist)

The British Association of Art Therapists

A professional organisation for art therapists in the UK.

Address: 24-27 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD

Telephone: 020 7686 4216

Email: hello@baat.org Website:

<https://baat.org/>

The British Association for Music Therapy

Information about music therapy for practitioners and the public.

Address: 86-90 Paul Street, London EC2A 4NE

Telephone: 020 7837 6100

Email: info@bamt.org

Website: **www.bamt.org**

The British Acupuncture Council

Information on local registered acupuncturists and acupressure therapists.

Address: 63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9HQ

Telephone: 020 8735 0400

Email: info@acupuncture.org.uk

Website: **<https://acupuncture.org.uk>**

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Contact this association for advice about hypnotherapists in the UK.

Address: 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire LE17 4HB

Telephone: 01455 883 300

Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Website **www.bacp.co.uk**

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)

Accredited register and voluntary regulator of complementary therapists for a wide range of different therapies.

Telephone: 020 3327 2720

Email: info@cnhc.org.uk

Website: **www.cnhc.org.uk**

Complementary Therapists Association

Advice about qualified practitioners and therapies.

Address: Room 4.11, 83 Baker Street, London, W1U 6AG
Telephone: 07718 479 416
Email: info@ctha.com
Website: www.ctha.com

Federation of Holistic Therapists

A voluntary register of therapists, accredited by the Professional Standards Authority.

Email: through the website contact page
Website: www.fht.org.uk/find-a-therapist

General Hypnotherapy Standards Council & General Hypnotherapy register

A professional association of hypnotherapists offering a search facility to find registered practitioners.

Address: GHSC & GHR, PO BOX 204, Lymington SO41 6WP
Email: admin@general-hypnotherapy-register.com
Website: <https://general-hypnotherapy-register.com/hypnotherapist-search/>

Health and Care Professions Council

Have a register of professionals who meet their standards for training and professional skills. Includes physiotherapists and art therapists, but not complementary therapists.

Address: Park House, 184 Kennington Park Road, London, SE11 4BU
Telephone: 0300 500 6184
Website: www.hcpc-uk.org

Hypnotherapy Directory

Offers a list of qualified professional hypnotherapists.

Address: Building B, Riverside Way, Camberley, Surrey, GU15 3YL
Telephone: 0333 325 2502
Email: through the website contact page
Website: www.hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk

The International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists

For details and locations of registered practitioners in aromatherapy.

Address: 82 Ashby Road, Hinckley, Leicestershire LE10 1SN
Telephone: 01455 637 987
Email: admin@ifparoma.org
Website: <https://ifparoma.org>

References

References used to support this document are available on request from:
Email: infofeedback@mndassociation.org

Or write to:

Information feedback, MND Association, Francis Crick House,
6 Summerhouse Rd, Moulton Park Industrial Estate, Northampton NN3 6BJ

Acknowledgements

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Further information

We provide related information sheets you may find helpful:

- 3D – *Hospice and palliative care*
- 6A – *Physiotherapy*
- 11D – *Managing fatigue*

We also have the following booklets which you may find helpful:

Emotional and psychological support – ways to find emotional support after an MND diagnosis.

Personal Care – ways to manage everyday personal tasks such as washing, dressing and intimate caring with MND.

Making the most of life with MND – ideas and shared experiences from people living with MND on how you can continue doing the things you enjoy.

Telling people about MND – to help open conversations with family, children, friends, colleagues and health and social care professionals.

Types of Care – overview of the range of care available to help you if you have MND or Kennedy's disease.

You can also refer to our main guides:

- *Living with motor neurone disease* – our main guide about MND and how to manage its impact
- *Caring and MND: support for you* – comprehensive information for unpaid and family carers, who are supporting someone living with MND
- *Caring and MND: quick guide* – the summary version of our information for carers

You can download most of our publications from our website at:

www.mndassociation.org/publications or order in print from the MND Connect team, who can provide additional information and support:

MND Connect

Telephone: 0808 808 6262

Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

MND Association, Francis Crick House,
6 Summerhouse Rd, Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6BJ

Equipment loans and MND Support grants

Telephone: 0808 802 6262

Email: support.services@mndassociation.org

Website: **www.mndassociation.org/support-and-information**

MND Association website and online forum

Website: **www.mndassociation.org**

Online forum: **<https://forum.mndassociation.org/>** or through the website

We welcome your views

We'd love to know what you think we're doing well and where we can improve our information for people with or affected by MND, or Kennedy's disease. Your anonymous comments may also be used to help raise awareness and influence within our resources, campaigns and applications for funding.

To feedback on any of our information sheets, access our online form at:

www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/infosheets_1-25

You can request a paper version of the form or provide direct feedback by email:

infofeedback@mndassociation.org

Or write to:

Information feedback, MND Association, Francis Crick House, 6 Summerhouse Rd,
Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6BJ

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