



6B

Complementary therapies

Information for people with or affected by Motor Neurone Disease (MND) or Kennedy's disease.

Complementary therapies may help ease the affects of some symptoms and anxiety if you have motor neurone disease (MND) or Kennedy's disease. If you are a carer, you may find these therapies helpful too. This information sheet explores complementary therapies and how to access this support. The content includes:

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



This content has been evidenced, user tested and reviewed by experts. See: piftick.org.uk



This symbol highlights quotes from people living with or affected by MND or Kennedy's disease.



How do I download or order your information resources?

To help you explore further, you will see our information resources mentioned throughout this booklet, as relevant to a subject.

Seek 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?

1. What are complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies are non-medical treatments that can be used alongside the conventional treatments provided by health and social care professionals. With MND and Kennedy's disease, complementary therapies may help ease some symptoms, but cannot stop or slow down the way these symptoms progress.

The MND Association does not necessarily recommend complementary therapies but some people may find them helpful to promote a sense of wellbeing.

How much do they cost?

Some therapies may be available or free of charge with the NHS, so ask your GP for guidance in your area.

Local hospices often offer outpatient complementary therapies and other palliative care from diagnosis, so it is worth checking what is available early on. Your GP or another member of your health and social care team can refer you.

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 some financial support towards the cost of complementary therapy.



See our information sheet: **3D Hospice and palliative care** and section 5 **How do I find out more?** for details about how to access our support.

How can complementary therapies help me?

Many people with MND or Kennedy's disease find that complementary therapies help relieve symptoms, such as:

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



See our guide **Emotional and psychological support** for help to manage an MND diagnosis.

2. What types of complementary therapies are available?

A wide range of therapies are available, some of which are listed below. Ask your GP and the relevant therapist to ensure a therapy is suitable for you and your symptoms.



See section 5: **How do I find out more?** for other organisations that can help you find registered therapists.

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 your 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, believed to relax the muscles, improve circulation and relieve pain.

Aromatherapy aims to stimulate parts of the brain linked to feelings and emotions. This can improve mood and create a sense of wellbeing.

These oils can be:

- applied to your skin in a carrier oil or base cream
- inhaled, often by adding to a bath
- used with massage.

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

Art therapy

This therapy uses a variety of art forms to help you express yourself freely. This can help you address emotional issues which may feel difficult using words. Art therapy may be provided by an art psychotherapist, who will listen to you during the session.

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 to make sense of how you are feeling. This can help you come to terms with difficult emotions you may be experiencing.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapists use hypnosis to take you into a state of deep relaxation, so they can help your subconscious mind learn 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 is where a therapist manipulates the soft tissue areas of your body. A range of techniques may help relieve tension and improve circulation. For example, they may apply pressure with 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 therapy session 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

You can use music to improve emotional wellbeing. In music therapy sessions, both you and your therapist use musical instruments, voice and rhythm to express yourselves and communicate.

It is thought to improve emotional wellbeing by increasing your self-awareness and allowing expression, without the need for words. You don't need musical skills to participate in music therapy.

Reiki

The practice of Reiki is based on channelling energy, which is thought to flow through the body. By balancing this energy system, it is believed your 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 your 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 or Kennedy's disease, as there may be risk of falling, muscle strain or fatigue.

Get advice from your GP before attempting therapies with movement. These could include the following or elements of:

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

3 What are the guidelines for therapists?

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

The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) is a voluntary regulator that was set up with government support. It provides a register of therapists who have met national standards in this field of practice.

Their 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 information about professionally qualified, registered therapists.

It is important that therapists are aware of how MND or Kennedy's disease affects you and any medications that you may be taking.

Let them know if you have any problems with:

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

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.



See information sheet: **6A Physiotherapy** for more on hydrotherapy.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy and exercise helps maintain muscles that have not been affected by MND or Kennedy's disease. This type of therapy cannot reverse symptoms or stop them progressing, but it can improve flexibility and help prevent stiffness and pain.

If you can no longer move easily on your own, assisted or 'passive' exercises can help. This is where the therapist moves your limbs or guides your carer to help you. Your carer can then support your exercise routine between appointments.

Excessive exercise is not advised with MND or Kennedy's disease and can cause fatigue, so always get individual advice from a qualified physiotherapist, with experience of your neurological condition.

5. How do I find out more?

Other organisations

We cannot endorse organisations, but the following may help your search for further information. Our MND Connect helpline can help you find organisations. See contact details later in this section, under the heading: Our support.

The Association of Reflexologists

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

Tel: 01823 351010
Email: info@aor.org.uk
Website: aor.org.uk

The British Association of Art Therapists

A professional organisation for art therapists in the UK.

Tel: 020 7686 4216
Email: hello@baat.org
Website: baat.org

The British Association for Music Therapy

Information about music therapy for practitioners and the public.

Tel: 020 7837 6100
Email: info@bamt.org
Website: bamt.org

The British Acupuncture Council

Information on local registered acupuncturists and acupressure therapists.

Tel: 020 8735 0400
Email: info@acupuncture.org.uk
Website: acupuncture.org.uk

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Contact this association for advice about hypnotherapists in the UK.

Tel: 01455 883 300
Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk
Website: bacp.co.uk

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)

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

Tel: 020 3327 2720
Email: info@cnhc.org.uk
Website: cnhc.org.uk

Complementary Therapists Association

Advice about qualified practitioners and therapies.

Tel: 07718 479 416

Email: info@ctha.com

Website: ctha.com

Federation of Holistic Therapists

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

Email: through the website contact page

Website: fht.org.uk/find-a-therapist

General Hypnotherapy Standards Council & General Hypnotherapy register

Provides a search facility to find registered practitioners.

Email: admin@general-hypnotherapy-register.com

Website: <https://general-hypnotherapy-register.com/hypnotherapist-search>

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

Includes a register of health professionals who meet the HCPC standards of practice.

Tel: 0300 500 6184

Website: hcpc-uk.org

Hypnotherapy Directory

Offers a list of qualified professional hypnotherapists.

Tel: 0333 325 2502

Email: through the website contact page

Website: hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk

The International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists

For details and locations of registered practitioners in aromatherapy.

Tel: 01455 637 987

Email: admin@ifparoma.org

Website: ifparoma.org

Acknowledgements

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Hazel Russo	Communications Consultant, Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council.

References

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

Or write to:
Information feedback,
Motor Neurone Disease Association,
Francis Crick House,
6 Summerhouse Road,
Moulton Park,
Northampton, NN3 6BJ

Further information

We offer a wide range of information about MND and Kennedy's disease. You may find the following resources helpful, relating to this sheet.

Information sheets

- 3D Hospice and palliative care
- 6A Physiotherapy
- 6C Managing pain
- 11D Managing fatigue

Booklets

- Emotional and psychological support
- Personal Care
- Making the most of life with MND
- Telling people about MND
- Types of Care
- Caring and MND - a quick guide
- Kennedy's disease

Large guides

- Living with MND
- Caring and MND - support for you

Search for information by need at: mndassociation.org/careinfofinder

Find information for professionals at: mndassociation.org/professionals

Download our information at: mndassociation.org/publications

Find information in other languages at: mndassociation.org/languages

Order printed copies from our MND Connect helpline (see Our support next).

Our support

Every day we support people affected by motor neurone disease, campaign for better care and fund ground-breaking research. Because with MND, every day matters.

We also support people affected by Kennedy's disease.

MND Connect

Our helpline offers practical and emotional support, information and signposting to people with MND, carers, family and professionals. Find out more and current opening times at: mndassociation.org/mndconnect

Tel: 0808 802 6262

Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

Support services

Find out about our support services at: mndassociation.org/our-services

Local and regional support

Find out about our branches and groups at: mndassociation.org/local-support

MND Association Benefits Advice Service

For help to identify claims and how to apply, visit: mndassociation.org/benefitsadvice or call our MND Connect helpline.

Tel: 0808 802 6262

MND Association website and online forum

Website: mndassociation.org

Online forum: forum.mndassociation.org

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 MND or Kennedy's disease, their families and carers.

Your anonymous comments may also be used to help raise awareness and influence within our resources, campaigns, and applications for funding.

To give feedback on any of our information sheets, access our online form at:
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
Motor Neurone Disease Association
Francis Crick House,
6 Summerhouse Road,
Moulton Park
Northampton, NN3 6BJ

Would you like to help with user review of our information?

If you are living with MND or Kennedy's disease, or a carer, contact us at
infofeedback@mndassociation.org

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