6B

Complementary therapies

Information for people with or affected by motor neurone 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.

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.

The MND Association has been certified as a producer of reliable health and social care information.

www.england.nhs.uk/tis
1: What are complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies are non-medical treatments that can be used alongside conventional treatments. 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.

How much do they cost?

Some therapies may be available on the NHS, so ask your GP surgery 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, so it is worth checking what is available.

If you need to pay for your therapy, ask for the price in advance when you are making a booking, as the costs can vary. Some therapies may be expensive, particularly if they are used long-term.

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.

2: What types of complementary therapy are available?

This section describes some complementary therapies. How your MND affects you may limit which therapies you are able to try. Talk to your GP and the relevant therapist to ensure the therapies you receive are right for you. Other complementary therapies are available. See section 5: How do I find out more? for organisations that can direct you to a wider range of therapies with qualified therapists.
Acupuncture

During an acupuncture session, fine needles are inserted into the channels 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.

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.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is based on using aroma to stimulate the parts of the brain linked to feelings and emotions. This is believed to relax the muscles, improve circulation and relieve pain.

Essential oils may be used for inhalation or added to creams for use on the skin. 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.

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 kneading the soft tissue areas of the body 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.

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 the body is better able to balance itself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

In its simplest form, the Reiki practitioner places their hands on you to encourage energy to flow. This is sometimes called hands-on healing. The ultimate goal is to restore balance within the body.

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 encouraging the elimination of toxins.

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

Various complementary therapies involve movement or exercise. Depending on how MND affects you, they may not be suitable for you. However they may be helpful for your carer.

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. See section 5: How do I find out more? for contact details.

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: Are there conventional therapies I can use?

This section looks at some conventional therapies that can also be used alongside medical treatments to aid wellbeing or ease some symptoms. These therapies should be provided by a qualified therapist.

**Art therapy**

This therapy uses art to help people express themselves more freely and address emotional issues which may feel difficult using words.

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.

**Hydrotherapy**

This therapy involved 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 allow 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*

**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.

**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. 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?

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

The British Association for Art Therapy
A professional organisation for art therapists in the UK.
Address: 24-27 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD
Telephone: 020 7686 4216
Email info@baat.org
Website www.baat.org

The British Association for Music Therapy
Information about music therapy for practitioners and the public.
Address: 24-27 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD
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 www.acupuncture.org.uk
**The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**
Contact this association for advice about hypnotherapists in the UK.
Address: BACP House, 15 St John’s Business Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire LE17 4HB
Telephone: 01455 883300
Email bacp@bacp.co.uk
Website [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

**Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)**
A public register of complementary therapists.
Address: Albert Buildings, 49 Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4N 4SA
Telephone: 020 7653 1971
Email: info@cnhc.org.uk
Website [http://www.cnhc.org.uk](http://www.cnhc.org.uk)

**Complementary Therapists Association**
Advice about qualified practitioners and therapies.
Address: 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](http://www.igpp.co.uk)

**Federation of Holistic Therapists**
A voluntary register of therapists, accredited by the Professional Standards Authority.
Email: through the website contact page
Website [http://findatherapist.fht.org.uk](http://findatherapist.fht.org.uk)

**Health and Care Professions Council**
Registered professionals meeting 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: 0845 300 6184
Website [www.hpc-uk.org](http://www.hpc-uk.org)

**Hypnotherapy Directory**
This organisation offers a list of qualified professional hypnotherapists.
Address: Coliseum, Riverside Way, Camberley, Surrey, GU15 3YL
Telephone: 0844 8030 242
Email: through the website contact page
Website [www.hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk/](http://www.hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk/)
The International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists
Contact this federation for details and locations of registered practitioners in aromatherapy.
Address: 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 (ICNM) and the British Register of Complementary Practitioners
Advise on safe and best practice of complementary medicine with information on practitioners.
Address: Can-Mezzanine, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH
Telephone: 0207 922 7980
Email: info@icnm.org.uk
Website: www.icnm.org.uk

References
References used to support this document are available on request from:
Email: infofeedback@mndassociation.org
Or write to:
Information feedback, MND Association, PO Box 246, Northampton NN1 2PR

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Further information
We provide related information sheets you may find helpful:
6A – Physiotherapy
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
MND Association, PO Box 246, Northampton NN1 2PR
Telephone: 0808 802 6262
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

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, PO Box 246, Northampton NN1 2PR

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