

# COMPLEMENTARY & OTHER THERAPIES

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Many people with Multiple Sclerosis have benefited hugely from using complementary and alternative therapies. There are a number of therapeutic approaches available. These can be in addition to or '*complementary*' to conventional treatments, or as an '*alternative*' to the traditional approach.

It is estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of people with MS have used a form of complementary or alternative therapy to help manage their symptoms in one way or another.

Complementary therapies can help MS; sometimes improvement is dramatic, sometimes less so. In the majority of cases people generally *feel* better.

A therapist will look at you as a whole. They will look at diet, lifestyle and your state of mind. They will always try and look to see what the root cause of the problem is, therefore treating the cause and not the symptom. Each person is treated as an individual and any treatment is tailored to the specific needs of that person.

One of the main advantages of using these treatments is that it puts you, the individual, in charge and in control of your own health; doing something positive to help yourself.

There is a lack of scientific research available into complementary therapies. Medical professionals want proof that things work. However more and more are opening their eyes to such treatments. If you search on the internet there is a lot of anecdotal evidence and a lot of people are happy with just this. If it works for one, it may work for another; therefore worth a try.

Some of the more common therapies include:

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Chiropractic
- Herbal medicine
- Homeopathy
- Massage therapy
- Osteopathy
- Pilates/Yoga
- Reflexology
- Meditation
- HDOT (High Dose Oxygen Therapy)

**Acupuncture:** Is a therapy based on the energy of the body, mind, spirit and the twelve main energy pathways, or meridians. It involves the use of very fine needles, which puncture the skin to reach an acupuncture



point. It is not considered painful, just a small prick to the skin and maybe a dull ache for a few seconds when the point is reached. Some people benefit quite quickly, others require more extensive treatment, and for some it may not provide the results they are looking for.

For MS, Acupuncture can be used to relieve pain and tension, improve movement, sensation and spasticity. It can help eye problems and bladder urgency. It may also help to reduce fatigue and increase energy levels and give a boost to the immune system.

**Aromatherapy:** Uses powerful, fragrant essential oils that have a positive effect on mind and body. They are used together with massage to help you feel relaxed, or energised. 'Essential' oils are the 'essence' of the plant. They are extracted from herbs, flowers, shrubs or trees. Each one is different with its own fragrance and therapeutic use. The essential oils are able to penetrate the skin and enter the bloodstream. Some oils have anti-inflammatory properties, others bring about a feeling of relaxation and others are stimulating. Many are known to have such potent effects on the mind that they can change your mood in minutes. An aromatherapy massage can help to relax the whole body, improve circulation and help to reduce swellings and pain. To get the full health benefits of aromatherapy it is always best to see a professional Aromatherapist.

**Chiropractic:** Is a system of gentle manipulation to treat disorders of the joints, ligaments and muscles and their effect on the nervous system. It is effective for back pain, neck pain, headaches, migraine and sports injuries.

In MS, it can help to restore a range of movements and prevent further loss of movement. It may also help with pain. Treatment consists of a wide range of manipulation techniques (some very gentle) designed to improve the function of the joints, relieving pain and muscle spasm.

*"My body feels twisted and uncomfortable due to my poor mobility and posture. Chiropractic treatment gives me the ability to move more freely."*

**Herbal Medicine:** Herbalists use medicinal plants to treat illnesses. These can be a form of fluid extracts, tinctures, tablets, powders or teas which you brew up yourself from dried ingredients. Herbs can be very powerful. There may be contraindications because of your individual medical history, your current situation, your symptoms and any medicine you are already taking. Therefore it is always advised to seek the help and advice of a qualified Medical Herbalist.

Herbalism can help in:

- Supporting the immune system. Strengthening the nervous system and easing inflammation.
- Helping the digestive system, including kidneys, liver, gall bladder etc and problems such as candida and leaky gut.
- Helping with symptoms such as muscle spasm, urinary problems, constipation, exhaustion and emotional problems.
- Helping with other conditions or complications.

**Homeopathy:** Is based on the principle that 'like cures like'. Highly diluted substances are used, usually in tablet form or drops. The Homeopath will ask a number of very detailed questions to make up a concise case history of you. This will look at the whole person, including personality, temperament, state of mind and lifestyle, before choosing remedies tailor-made to the individual.

Substances are taken which trigger the body's healing mechanisms. A past condition can resurface and manifest itself in a mild form for a short time. Some substances would be quite poisonous in their undiluted state but they are so dilute that they cannot be detected in the normal way. They are thought to work through cellular memory at a vibrational level.

In MS, Homeopathy may help lessen fatigue, increase energy, warm up cold extremities and help to detoxify the body.

**Massage Therapy:** Is the oldest known therapy and has been used for thousands of years. It is used to help ease stiffness in muscles and joints, relieve pain, improve blood and lymph circulation and increase well-being. It can also be used to stimulate the various systems of the body and can also help with posture, ease stress and tension. Also helps to rid the body of toxins.

Various forms of massage can be beneficial to those with MS. Apart from the good it does to the muscles etc, it is also relaxing.

There are different types of massage, some gentle, others more vigorous. Here are just some of them...

- *Therapeutic Massage* – a traditional type form. Good for relieving aching joints and muscles.
- *Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)* – helps to drain blocked wastes, removes toxins and helps keep unused muscles in tone. Very gentle massage. Works on the circulation of the lymph, stimulating lymphatic drainage.
- *Shiatsu* – a very stimulating massage where a firm pressure is applied to acupressure points. This helps to release blockages and stimulate the flow of chi – or energy. The therapist will use fingers, thumbs, palms and heels of hands, forearms, elbows, knees and feet. Some people find it quite painful, others enjoy it. It helps with a range of symptoms, including depression, constipation and low vitality. It also helps to tone up the nervous system, immune system and circulation and helps eliminate toxins.

*"It helps in different ways depending on the situation. When I am stressed it is very relaxing. When I am tired and stiff I feel more flexible afterwards."*

*"Shiatsu is a wonderful massage that significantly changes the energy."*

- *Thai Massage* – quite a vigorous massage. The therapist uses his or her own body to help you thoroughly stretch every part of your body. Thai Massage releases tension, increases vitality and creates wholeness of mind, body and spirit.

There is also Aromatherapy Massage, Swedish Massage, Hot Stone, Deep tissue, Sports Massage, amongst others.

It has been found that massage lowers anxiety and depression, raises self esteem and gives a general sense of well-being.

**Osteopathy:** Osteopathy recognises that much of the pain and disability we suffer stems from abnormalities in our body's structure and function. An Osteopath recognises and treats problems in the body's framework of bones, joints, muscles and ligaments to help the body heal naturally. When the body is balanced and working efficiently it will function with minimum wear and tear, leaving more energy for living. Treatment can involve gentle, manual techniques to help ease pain, reduce swelling and improve mobility.

*"Cranial Osteopathy seems to 'rebalance' me and my nervous system."*

**Pilates:** Is a form of exercise that helps to elongate, strengthen and restore the body to balance. Classes focus on specific areas individually, whilst using exercises that help to integrate

the whole body to re-educate and restore it to optimum muscular and skeletal function. It is recommended by physiotherapists, chiropractors, osteopaths and GP's, as one of the safest forms of exercise today. Pilates is beneficial for general fitness, specific health conditions and most of all for your overall well-being.

It helps to:

- improve posture
- improve mobility and flexibility of the spine
- increases stability for the pelvis and shoulders
- build up the core muscles
- relieves stress and tension
- promotes a feeling of well-being

In conditions such as MS, it can help to:

- build better balance and coordination
- alleviate aches and pains
- helps to maintain and improve bone density
- develops the function and efficiency of the lungs
- improves quality of life

**Yoga:** Is a group of Indian spiritual practices designed for the purpose of cultivating a steady mind – a 'union' of mind, body and soul. A practitioner of Yoga is called a Yogi or Yogini. There are four main forms of Yoga – Hatha Yoga being the most common in Western Yoga classes. Yoga can complement medical science and other therapies for specific conditions. Yoga can help to improve your health and fitness. It can also be very relaxing and as it is not strenuous it can be beneficial to any ability.

**Reflexology:** Is a complementary therapy that works on the hands and feet, encouraging the body to heal itself naturally. The body is treated as a whole, not just the symptoms. Gentle pressure is applied to certain reflex points on either the hands or feet and the 'zones' of the body are worked over. By working on these points, blockages can be released and help to restore the free flow of energy around the body. This helps to increase energy and help to boost the immune system. Tension can be eased and circulation improved. Reflexologists will not diagnose or claim to cure anything but help bring the body back into balance.

*"I have reflexology every 2 weeks, it leaves me feeling relaxed and I am able to move my feet a little more than usual".*

Reflexology is an enjoyable, very relaxing treatment and can help to treat a number of things, such as:

- Stress
- back pain
- Migraine
- sleep disorders
- digestive problems
- Inflammation
- hormonal imbalances, amongst many others.

*"Reflexology helps my spasms slightly and is just generally relaxing and pleasant."*

**Meditation:** Is the process by which a person gradually "lets go" of thoughts and feelings, thereby becoming more relaxed, focused and creative. It has been practised for over 5000 years.

If taking part in a Meditation class the teacher will encourage a gradual release of all thoughts and feelings. There are a number of different forms of meditation:

- Concentrating on the breath
- The development of kind thoughts and feelings to others
- Mentally repeating a mantra on the out-breath
- Simply being aware of thoughts and feelings as they arise without changing or guiding them (Zen)
- Focussing on a particular thought or object
- Meditation whilst walking
- Meditation whilst carrying out everyday tasks

It is thoroughly relaxing. It provides the individual with a number of health benefits and has also shown improvement in concentration, memory and creativity if practised regularly.

**HDOT (High Dose Oxygen Therapy):** By breathing pure oxygen while under increased air pressure (hyperbaric oxygen) many people find relief from their symptoms and, it is thought, can help in slowing down the progression of the disease. The therapy is easy to take although it requires going to a centre regularly, ideally 3 or 4 times a week initially. The therapy actually takes place in a metal chamber usually large enough to seat 6-8 people, who spend an hour under pressure, breathing pure oxygen through masks. HDOT is by no means a cure for MS but it does seem to offer some people very effective help. It has been shown to be useful in improving symptoms such as:

- Poor balance
- Fatigue
- Mobility problems
- Sensory perception difficulties
- Incontinence
- Speech problems

*"HBO has a therapeutic nature. I enjoy spending time with other MSers and exchanging ideas."*

Operators are very skilled and trained; they have access to specialist medical advisors and a manual from which they work. Many people benefit from a reduction in the severity of symptoms and improved quality of life. There are a number of centres around the country that offer this therapy. To find out which is closest to you please contact the MSRC office.

No one Therapist will claim to cure but they can help to relieve some MS symptoms. It is important to find a reputable therapist who is fully insured, all of which should be members of a professional body. You can contact these organisations to find a Therapist near you. Details of some of these are at the end of this pack.

If there is a therapy that you interested in that isn't mentioned in these pages, then please contact us and we will do our best to find out more for you.

If you are interested in Complementary Therapies you may also like to have a look at MSRC's book "A to Z Guide to Complementary Therapies", written by the editor of New Pathways, Judy Graham. It covers the widest possible range of different therapies, including information about all sorts of vitamins and mineral supplements, exercise, diet & nutrition; all tried by people with MS. You can find information on this book on our website. If you wish to purchase a copy for £12.50 you can do so by contacting the office or through our web shop.

The results of a short survey on alternative and complementary therapies show that the 2 most

common therapies tried by people with MS are Acupuncture and Reflexology.

Other therapies also tried by people with MS not mentioned above are:  
Alexander Technique, Bach Flower Remedies, Bowen Technique, Hypnotherapy, Indian Head Massage, Kinesiology, Magnetic Therapy, Reiki, Tai Chi, Thermo Auricular Therapy.

## **USEFUL CONTACTS....**

### **The British Medical Acupuncture Society**

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### **The British Chiropractic Association**

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Email: enquiries@chiropractic-uk.co.uk  
Website: www.chiropractic-uk.co.uk

### **The Aromatherapy Council**

The National Register of Aromatherapists is available by contacting the council.  
Tel: 0870 7743477  
Website: www.aromatherapycouncil.co.uk

### **The British Herbal Medicine Association**

PO Box 583  
Exeter  
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### **The National Institute of Medical Herbalists**

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therapies)**

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**The Pilates Foundation**

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**Association of Reflexologists**

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