

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

The term 'complementary therapies' describes a variety of non-medical treatments that are used in combination with conventional medicine in a holistic approach involving body, mind and spirit that attempts to heal or to relieve the symptoms of disease.

Complementary therapies are not cures or meant to replace standard treatment. In many cases, people with ALS find that symptoms associated with the disease are more manageable when they use some of the techniques of complementary therapies. Consult with your doctor before embarking upon an alternative course of treatment to ensure it does not conflict with any current standard treatment. A doctor may also be able to recommend a qualified therapist, as it is important to find a practitioner who is experienced and registered with an accredited organization before any therapy is undertaken. Practitioners of complementary therapies should be aware of the clinical issue inherent in the treatment of a person with ALS. Factors, such as poor communication, fatigue, edema, feeding tube issues, muscle spasms, pain and breathing problems, especially in relation to some essential oils that may be contraindicated in the case of respiratory dysfunction, must be considered. Following is a description of some forms of complementary therapies that some people with ALS have found useful.

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese medical technique of inserting and manipulating thin needles through the skin at specific points of the body to promote healing. Many studies have shown that acupuncture has an apparent beneficial effect on the human body but none have definitely explained why this is so. Conditions affecting the muscles often respond well to acupuncture, as do pain, itching, constipation, fatigue, anxiety and depression. People who use acupuncture claim that it leads to increased vitality, greater confidence, elevated mood, better sleep and a better appetite.

AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy is a form of therapy that uses oils extracted from aromatic plants to promote health and well-being. Essential oils are said to have a beneficial effect on the mind, body and spirit. There are hundreds of essential oils listed in the comprehensive guides to aromatherapy but therapists commonly use a few dozen, with specific oils used to treat specific ailments or complaints. It is important to use essential oils with caution, as some oils may cause adverse reactions in some people, especially in the case of those with respiratory dysfunction.

HYPNOTHERAPY

Hypnotherapy is a form of therapy that uses the techniques of hypnosis in combination with psychoanalysis and counselling to promote healing and to change negative behaviour. Hypnosis is a state of induced deep relaxation that in theory, allows the therapist to bypass the conscious mind and communicate directly with the subconscious mind. In this way, a skilled therapist can direct the participant away from harmful patterns and toward a more beneficial state of mind. Hypnotherapy can be effective in relieving sleep problems, fear, anxiety, stress and panic.

MASSAGE

Massage is a physical therapy that uses pressure to the soft tissue of the body including muscles, connective tissue, tendons, ligaments and joints. Massage is used to relieve psychological stress, manage pain, improve circulation and to relieve tension. It is sometimes used in combination with

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ACUPRESSURE

Acupressure is a therapeutic technique said to predate acupuncture and that is a less intrusive method of stimulating the healing points of the body. Deep finger pressure is applied to specific points that are thought to correspond to the organs and glands of the body to remove blockages, increase energy flow and stimulate good health.

SHIATSU

Shiatsu is a form of acupressure in which the therapists applies rhythmic pressure to specific points on the body using fingers, hands, elbows and knees to stimulate a healing flow of energy. Shiatsu may include gentle stretching and manipulation of limbs.

REFLEXOLOGY

Reflexology is an ancient Chinese technique that uses pressure points on the feet and sometimes the hands to promote relaxation, stimulate vital organs and to encourage healing in other parts of the body. This practice is based in the belief that all parts of the body are connected through the nervous system to the feet and that illness, stress, injury or disease creates a state of imbalance and blocks vital energy pathways. The practice of reflexology can be helpful for problems with stress, constipation, tension, headaches and poor circulation.

REIKI

Reiki is a form of 'healing touch' in which the therapist's hands are placed gently at specific positions on or above the body to channel energy through the body and to promote healing on physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels.

MEDITATION

Relaxation techniques are essential in the management of the anxiety and stress that afflicts not only people with ALS but their caregivers as well. Meditation is a form of conscious relaxation using breathing and focusing techniques. Through breathing exercises, the body is consciously relaxed, the mind becomes clear and focused and the mood is elevated. Health clinics and community centers may offer meditation classes or those with mobility problems can usually find someone who will offer private sessions in the home. It is also possible to learn meditation techniques through the use of books, videos, compact discs and tapes.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Alternative Medicine –

Healthcare Information Resources

<http://hsl.lib.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/altmed.html>

Friends of Alternative and Complementary Therapeutics Society (FACT)

www.thefacts.org

The Canadian Complementary Medical Association (CCMA)

www.cmadoctors.ca

CAMline

www.camline.org