



Complementary Therapies

A guide for people with polio or Post Polio Syndrome (PPS)

today's support and information network

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Introduction

Over the last 25 years, there has been an increased interest in complementary (also known as alternative) therapies for the treatment of many health conditions. Greater numbers of people with polio/ Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) are looking towards alternative methods of treating their symptoms, alongside, or instead of, more conventional treatments.

This factsheet gives some basic information about complementary therapies and discusses some of the therapies that are more widely available and that people may wish to try to alleviate PPS symptoms.

By producing this factsheet, The British Polio Fellowship is not recommending any particular treatment or therapy.

General dietary information and dietary supplements have not been included in this factsheet. Your GP can refer you to see a dietitian for appropriate advice.

Post Polio Symptoms

People who had polio years ago and made a full recovery may now be experiencing new symptoms. These can include new or increased muscle weakness and fatigue with or without other symptoms like muscle and joint pain, muscle atrophy or wasting, breathing or swallowing difficulties or cold intolerance.

Which complementary therapies may help if you have polio/PPS?

There is very little formal research into the benefits of individual complementary therapies in relation to polio/PPS - much of what is documented is hearsay.

However, there is some agreement that as long as the practitioner is properly qualified and you have consulted your doctor, complementary therapies may be able to help with symptoms.

It is important to remember that people respond differently to treatments - what works for one person may not necessarily work for another. It is very much a case of “try it and see”. The therapy you choose may not have a direct effect on your PPS symptoms, but it may help you to deal with some of them more effectively.

You should try not to pin all your hopes on the success of a particular complementary therapy, nor expect any improvements to happen as quickly as may be experienced with conventional medicine. It may take a while before you start to notice any improvements, but this varies.

This factsheet includes details of some of the complementary therapies that are more widely available. By providing this information, we are not recommending one therapy over another and just because a particular therapy has not been included here, this does not mean that it may not benefit you.

We also include details of some of the professional bodies or organisations for the therapies we have listed.

Why do people choose complementary therapies?

Complementary means, “to complete”. Some complementary therapies are based on systems practised thousands of years ago and can be considered one of the original forms of medicine.

Complementary practitioners aim to treat you holistically, meaning they work with you as a whole person, rather than just your symptoms. They may ask you questions about your lifestyle, including dietary and sleep habits, how you manage stress and your emotional, physical and/or mental and sometimes spiritual well being, to find out how these may be affecting your health.

One benefit of this holistic approach is that practitioners spend considerable time talking to you about your symptoms and lifestyle. This aims to build a good relationship between the two of you, and talking your concerns through with someone who shows empathy can in itself be therapeutic.

Some people may be attracted to complementary therapies as part of living a healthier lifestyle. Some may be interested for philosophical and/or spiritual reasons. Others may be concerned about the side effects of medication and are keen to explore drug-free alternatives to managing symptoms.

Some complementary therapies may help you to relax, sleep better and manage stress more effectively. This may help with PPS symptoms such as pain and fatigue.

Before starting complementary therapy:

- talk to your GP or consultant about the therapy you are thinking of starting. This is particularly important if you are taking any prescribed medication and/or undergoing any medical treatment. It is worthwhile asking your GP if that particular therapy is available on the NHS
- make sure that your practitioner is qualified and is registered with a relevant professional body. Some of these are listed at the end of this factsheet.

Will I have to pay for my treatment?

Complementary therapies are not generally available on the NHS, so you will usually have to pay for treatments yourself. It is important to remember that you may need a whole course of treatments, rather than just one or two sessions.

Some practitioners may be able to offer reduced rates for those on benefits/low incomes, but this varies. Some therapy schools or training organisations may be able to offer free or reduced-price therapies if you are happy to visit a student practitioner.

Therapies, such as acupuncture and homeopathy, may be available on the NHS, so it is worthwhile talking to your GP about this. There are also some specialist NHS homeopathic hospitals in parts of the UK.

Accessibility

Complementary therapists work from a variety of locations, including health centres, commercial premises and private addresses. Not all of these buildings will be fully accessible, so you are advised to find out before booking a consultation. Some therapists may be able to make home visits.

Treatments

Here is a list of some of the most commonly available complementary therapies.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese practice. According to traditional Chinese philosophy, our health is dependent on the body's energy force - known as qi - moving in a smooth and balanced way through a series of meridians (channels) beneath the skin. The flow of qi can be disturbed by many factors: physical, mental and emotional, including anxiety, stress, anger, fear or grief, poor nutrition, hereditary factors, infections, poisons and trauma. By inserting fine needles into the `meridians`, an acupuncturist can stimulate the body's own healing response and help to restore its natural balance. Acupuncture has also been documented as an effective treatment for pain. This is one therapy which is often available through the NHS.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils in holistic treatments and is said to improve physical and emotional well being, increase energy levels and reduce stress.

Essential oils are extracted from plants and have distinctive therapeutic properties, which can be used to improve health and prevent disease. The oils are diluted (they can irritate your skin in their natural form) and are usually massaged into the skin, although they can be used in baths or inhaled.

You should get professional advice before using any essential oils, especially if you are pregnant, or have any other medical condition, such as asthma or skin allergies.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is not a complementary therapy, but has been included here as a tool used by complementary therapists as well as healthcare professionals and individuals.

Biofeedback instruments connect to the body and provide a signal, often a sound or a meter reading or a computer graphic, which tells you what is going on in that part of your body. By becoming more aware of your body's responses, you may then manage your particular health problem more effectively.

Biofeedback can be applied to a wide range of physical and psychological health conditions and there is much research to back-up findings. Many physiotherapy and occupational therapy departments use feedback of muscle tension. Some people who cannot make their muscles do what they want, for example due to a stroke or injury, can learn to improve the control of their muscles again.

It has been suggested that thermal biofeedback techniques have been effective in increasing peripheral (ie near the skin surface) blood flow in PPS patients with cold intolerance.

Chiropractic

A chiropractor treats problems with joints, bones and muscles and the effects they have on the nervous system. They work on all the joints of the body and concentrate particularly on the spine.

Chiropractors use their hands to make gentle, specific adjustments (the chiropractic word for manipulation) to stiff joints and tight muscles, to improve the efficiency of the nervous system, reduce pain, improve mobility and release the body's natural healing ability.

Herbal medicine

Herbal medicine or herbalism involves the use of plants to prevent and treat illness. The herbalist will aim to treat both the symptoms and the underlying cause of a condition. Herbs are prescribed in different forms, including tablets, tinctures and ointments.

Both Chinese and Western herbal medicine is available in the UK.

If you are considering herbal medicine, remember that natural does not necessarily mean safe and many plants are poisonous to humans. Herbal remedies should be used with care and can sometimes interact with any medication you are taking. You should never self-medicate without seeking advice from a registered herbalist or your GP.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is a holistic therapeutic system that has been used for over 200 years. It is based on the principle that “like treats like”. If given in larger doses, the remedy would produce the same symptoms as the disease or disorder that is being treated.

Homeopathic remedies are natural substances that are given in a highly diluted form, so they are usually safe. The remedies stimulate the body to heal itself.

Homeopathy is successful in treating a wide range of conditions, often after conventional medicine has not helped. It also may be combined successfully with conventional medicine.

When making an assessment, homeopaths and homeopathic doctors will take into account a range of physical, emotional and lifestyle factors before prescribing the appropriate remedies.

Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy is the use of water to treat a range of conditions, including arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders.

Hydrotherapy involves exercise, which takes place in a warm-water pool, usually within a hospital physiotherapy department. The water temperature is usually 33–37°C, which is warmer than normal swimming pools. The warm water relaxes muscles and eases joint pain, making it easier to exercise.

The water supports your weight, helping to increase the range of joint movement. By pushing your arms and legs against the water you can also improve your muscle strength.

Hydrotherapy can have a soothing effect on the body, helping to reduce stress and tension, promote relaxation and manage pain.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy, which uses the state of hypnosis to treat health conditions and enhance personal development, is known to have been in use for the past 6,000 years.

Hypnosis can be defined as a pleasant state of deep relaxation and altered awareness, where you are neither asleep nor unconscious. It is thought that during hypnosis, your mind is able to let go of negative thoughts and that the subconscious part of your mind responds creatively to suggestions.

Hypnotherapy is used to treat a variety of medical and psychological problems, including phobias, unwanted habits such as smoking, migraine, asthma, digestive disorders, stress and anxiety.

Hypnotherapy may be also combined with counselling to bring about emotional change. It can also be used to help patients manage chronic pain.

During the state of hypnosis, new ideas and suggestions can be placed directly into the subconscious mind, to bring about beneficial changes whilst in the waking state.

Hypnotherapy should not be confused with stage hypnosis and nobody can ever hypnotise you against your will.

The hypnotherapist has no power over you- just skill, which you can choose to take advantage of, or not. You will never accept any suggestion that is made to you unless it fits completely with your core beliefs and values.

Naturopathy

The principles of Naturopathy were first used by the Hippocratic School of Medicine in about 400B.C. The Greek philosopher Hippocrates believed in viewing the whole person to find the causes of disease, and using the laws of nature to bring about a cure. Harmony was restored with proper nutrition, water treatments, rest, sunshine and fasting.

Naturopaths are health practitioners and teachers who apply natural therapies. As well as nutritional therapy, fasting and exercise, these can include natural healing practices such as homeopathy, acupuncture and herbal medicine as well as more modern methods such as ozone therapy and colon hydrotherapy.

Naturopaths use a range of alternative methods of diagnosis such as iridology (study of the iris of the eye) as well as tongue and nail observation. Hair, stool or blood analysis may also be necessary.

An individual treatment plan is then formulated, to give the body the optimum opportunity to heal itself.

Osteopathy and Cranial Osteopathy

Osteopathy recognises the importance of the link between the structure of the human body and the way it functions. Osteopaths focus on the body's skeleton and joint function along with the underlying muscles, soft tissue and internal organs.

Osteopaths use gentle stretching and mobilising techniques as well as manipulating joints, to help bring about the healing process. Osteopaths can also give advice on self-help treatments, posture and exercise.

Osteopathy is used to treat pain in the back, hips and pelvis, neck and shoulder, sciatica, sports injuries and digestive problems such as heartburn and indigestion.

Cranial osteopathy is a refined and subtle type of osteopathic treatment. Cranial osteopaths are trained to feel a very subtle, rhythmical shape change that is present in all body tissues. This is called Involuntary Motion or the Cranial Rhythm.

Cranial osteopathy is used to treat back and neck pain, joint pain and sports injuries, headaches, migraines and sinus problems, stress, recurrent infections and digestive problems. Treatment may also benefit general health and well being.

Reflexology

Reflexology is based on the theory that a `reflex` point in the feet mirrors every organ, area and system of the body. By massaging these points in the feet the reflexologist's hands can detect tiny deposits and imbalances. By working on these points, the reflexologist aims to release blockages and restore the free flow of energy to the whole body, encouraging it to heal itself.

Other Therapies

A number of British Polio Fellowship members have shared details of complementary therapies they have found useful with others through the membership magazine, The Bulletin. These include the following:

Alexander Technique

Bach Flower Remedies

Bowen Technique

Healing groups

Magnet therapy (including Bioflow, magnetic bands, Magnopulse and Quantronic Resonance System)

Manual Lymphatic Drainage

Massage (including massage cushions and Indian Head Massage)

Reiki

Shiatsu

Contact addresses

Below is a list of professional bodies and organisations for some of the therapies featured in this factsheet. They can provide you with further information about the particular therapy, lists of registered practitioners in your area and information about training courses.

Some health food shops also have facilities for complementary therapists or lists of therapists in the area.

British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA)

Contact the BCMA for general information about different complementary therapies and finding a BCMA registered therapist.

BCMA
PO Box 5122
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH8 0WG

Telephone: 0845 345 5977
Email: office@bcma.co.uk
Website: www.bcma.co.uk

Institute for Complementary and Natural Medicine (ICNM)

General information about different complementary therapies and finding a practitioner listed on the British Register of Complementary Practitioners (BRCP)

ICNM
Can-Mezzaine,
32-36 Loman street,
London
SE1 OEH

Telephone: 020 7922 7980
Email: info@icnm.org.uk
Website: www.icnm.org.uk

The British Acupuncture Council (BAcC)

The BAcC is the UK's main regulatory body for the practice of traditional acupuncture.

BAcC
63 Jeddo Road
London
W12 9HQ

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

The British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS)

BMAS is a UK group of registered doctors and allied health professionals who practise acupuncture alongside more conventional techniques.

BMAS
BMAS House, 3 Winnington Court
Northwich
Cheshire
CW8 1AQ

Telephone: 01606 786782
Fax: 01606 786783
Email: admin@medical-acupuncture.co.uk
Website: www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk

BMAS
Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital

60 Great Ormond St
London
WC1N 3HR

Telephone: 020 7713 9437
Fax: 020 7713 6286
Email: bmaslondon@aol.com

Aromatherapy Council (AC)

The Aromatherapy Council is the lead body for the aromatherapy profession within the UK

Email: info@aromatherapycouncil.co.uk
Website: www.aromatherapycouncil.co.uk

The British Chiropractic Association (BCA)

The British Chiropractic Association is the largest and longest established association for chiropractors in the UK. Contact the BCA to find a qualified chiropractor in your area.

BCA
59 Castle Street
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 7SN

Telephone: 0118 950 5950
Email: enquiries@chiropractic-uk.co.uk
Website: www.chiropractic-uk.co.uk

General Chiropractic Council (GCC)

The General Chiropractic Council is a UK-wide statutory body with regulatory powers. Contact the GCC for details of registered chiropractors in your area.

GCC
44 Wicklow Street
London
WC1X 9HL

Telephone: 020 7713 5155
Email: enquiries@gcc-uk.org
Website: www.gcc-uk.org

National Institute of Medical Herbalists (NIMH)

Contact the NIMH for your nearest qualified medical herbalist.

NIMH
Elm House
54 Mary Arches Street
Exeter
EX4 3BA

Telephone: 01392 426022
Email: info@nimh.org.uk
Website: www.nimh.org.uk

Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine (RCHM)

Contact the RCHM for details of registered practitioners.

RCHM
Office 5
1 Exeter Street
Norwich
NR2 4QB

Telephone: 01603 623994
Email: herbmed@rchm.co.uk
Website: www.rchm.co.uk

British Homeopathic Association (BHA)

The BHA gives contact details of homeopathically qualified and registered medical professionals (including doctors, dentists and vets) and NHS homeopathic hospitals.

BHA
Hahnemann House
29 Park Street West
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU1 3BE

Telephone: 01582 408675
Email: info@britishhomeopathic.org
Website: www.britishhomeopathic.org

British Society of Clinical Hypnosis (BSCH)

Contact the BSCH for details of your nearest registered hypnotherapist.

Telephone: 01262 403103
Email: sec@bsch.org.uk
Website: www.bsch.org.uk

General Hypnotherapy Register (GHR)

The General Hypnotherapy Register is the largest professional register of hypnotherapists in the UK.

GHR
PO Box 204
Lymington
Hampshire
SO41 6WP

Email: admin@general-hypnotherapy-register.com
Website: www.general-hypnotherapy-register.com

The General Council and Register of Naturopaths (GCRN)

Contact the GCRN for details of registered naturopaths in your area.

GCRN
1 Green Lane Avenue
Somerset
BA16 OQS

Telephone: 08707 456984
Email: admin@naturopathy.org.uk
Website: www.naturopathy.org.uk

General Osteopathic Council (GOsC)

Contact the GOsC for your nearest registered osteopath.

GOsC
176 Tower Bridge Road
London
SE1 3LU

Telephone: 020 7357 6655
Email: contacts@osteopathy.org.uk
Website: www.osteopathy.org.uk

The Sutherland Society

To find a qualified cranial osteopath, contact the Sutherland Society.

The Sutherland Society
Church Street Practice
15a Church Street
Bradford on Avon
Wiltshire
BA15 1LN

Telephone: 0845 6030680
Website: www.cranial.org.uk

Association of Reflexologists

The Association of Reflexologists can put you in touch with a fully qualified reflexologist in your area.

Association of Reflexologists
5 Fore Street
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 1HX

Telephone: 01823 351010
Email: info@aor.org.uk
Website: www.aor.org.uk

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