



## Living with hep C:



# Complementary therapies: mind and body

**People living with a chronic illness often need to make changes to their everyday lives. The hints in this brochure are meant as a guide only. We hope that you find some of the hints or examples useful.**

Complementary therapies refer to those taken in addition to other treatment (not instead of). There is a vast range of complementary therapies available, with varying degrees of success. People choose to undertake complementary therapies for a variety of reasons, some of these include:

- Poor response to conventional treatment or intolerable side-effects.
- The relief of symptoms or side-effects of treatment.
- The desire for a more "natural" approach.
- Cultural/religious influences.
- Co-morbidity with other infections or health complaints.
- To take an active role in their own health care and quality of life.

If you decide to engage in complementary, it is important that you discuss this with your health care providers. By the same token, your complementary therapist/s should also be aware of any conventional treatments you are taking. This information will help the practitioner give you the best advice and information on your health.

Here, a few of the "mind-body" therapies are explored. For more information on herbal remedies, please refer to the Living with hep C factsheet "Complementary therapies: vitamins and herbs".

### *Massage*

Massage is the systemised manipulation of soft body tissues to prevent and alleviate pain, discomfort, muscle spasm and stress. Essentially, this practice aims to help the body heal itself and therefore increase health and well-being. Touch is the core ingredient of massage therapy. With specific techniques, practitioners use their sense of touch to determine adequate pressure to apply to the client and locate areas of tension and other soft-tissue problems. In addition, touch also carries a sense of caring and trust. This is an important component in healing.

A good massage improves circulation, increasing blood flow and bringing fresh oxygen to body tissues. This can assist the elimination of waste products, speed healing after injury, and enhance recovery from chronic illness such as hepatitis C. Stress relief is an important function of massage. Once the body is consciously relaxed, the brain is able to clear negative thoughts and function better during stressful situations. Consciously relaxing the body and the mind can result in a feeling of peace and rarely experienced in other ways.

There are a number of types of massage therapy. Some of these include:

- Relaxation Massage – smooth and calming.
- Remedial Massage - restores function to injured muscles, tendons and ligaments.
- Sports Massage - enhances sports performance and recuperation.
- Aromatherapy Massage – utilises therapeutic properties of essential oils.

- Reflexology – uses pressure on the reflex points of the feet (which correspond to all areas of the body) to help balance body systems.
- Oriental Massage Therapies - combines pressure and assisted-stretching techniques to release discomfort and rebalance energy.

## **Acupuncture**

Originating in China more than 2000 years ago, acupuncture is one of the oldest and most commonly used complimentary therapies in the world. In traditional Chinese medicine, the body is a delicate balance of two opposing and inseparable forces: yin and yang. Yin represents the cold, slow, or passive principle, while yang represents the hot, excited, or active principle. Optimal health is achieved through the balancing of these forces, ensuring the flow of vital energy (or qi) through the body along pathways known as meridians.

The term “acupuncture” describes a group of procedures involving stimulation of specific points on the body. The technique most scientifically studied involves manipulating thin, metallic needles penetrating the skin by the hands or electrical stimulation.

The practice is used extensively for a variety of medical purposes, including prevention and treatment of disease, pain relief and anesthetising patients for surgery. In traditional Chinese medicine, the highest form of acupuncture was given to promote a long, healthy life. In the case of hepatitis, stagnation in liver qi and an excess of damp heat reflect the presence of the virus. Acupuncture can be applied to stimulate the energy and help clear blockages, as well as keep the liver cool and moist.

## **Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy means “treatment using scents”. It is an holistic treatment which uses botanical oils such as rose, lemon, lavender, geranium and peppermint, extracted from plants, flowers, trees, fruits, bark, grasses and seeds with distinctive therapeutic, psychological, and physiological properties. Each of these are from pure, raw materials – synthetic variations do

not have the same health benefits. The oils can be used for the relief of pain, skin care, easing of tension and fatigue or to invigorate the whole body.

Applications of essential oils can be done in several ways. Direct inhalation, massage, diffusion into a room, ingestion (selected oils only) and direct skin contact are some examples. Aromatherapy works on the brain and nervous system through stimulation of the olfactory nerves after inhalation. This can consequently affect psychological and physiological processes. When absorbed through the skin, essential oils can reach the organs to be treated through connective and lymphatic tissues and the circulatory system.

## **Meditation**

Meditation has been proven to be an effective way to lower blood pressure, improve exercise performance in people with angina, help people with asthma breathe easier, relieve insomnia and generally relax the everyday stresses of life. If you are living with hepatitis C, stress could well be your worst enemy.

Meditation works by bringing the brainwave pattern into an alpha state, which is a level of consciousness which promotes healing. The use of Meditation for healing is not new, in fact the value of meditation to alleviate suffering and promote healing has been known and practiced for thousands of years.

Common benefits include:

- Increased brain wave harmony, associated with greater creativity, improved moral reasoning, and higher IQ.
- Improved learning ability and memory.
- Decreased anxiety.
- Decreased depression, increased happiness.
- Decreased irritability and moodiness and increased self-actualisation.
- Increased feelings of vitality and rejuvenation.
- Increased emotional stability.
- Decreased metabolic rate, lower heart rate, reduced blood pressure and reduced work load on the heart.
- Lowered levels of cortisol and lactate; chemicals associated with stress.

- Reduction of free radicals - unstable oxygen molecules that can cause tissue damage. They are now thought to be a major factor in aging and in many diseases.

Deep relaxation is also used to help center and stabilise people, giving them the opportunity to figure out how to handle a chronic illness such as hepatitis C and proceed with life.

## **Yoga**

Perfected over hundreds of years by Indian philosophers and mystics, yoga works on the mind and the body at the same time, aiming to increase the body's supply of energy and remove any blockages.

Yoga uses a variety of postures (known as asanas) performed slowly and smoothly in combination with specific breathing (known as pranayama) and meditation. This assists in the maintenance of healthy posture, alignment and patterns of movement, making the body more flexible and able to cope with stressful situations and illness. Reported benefits of yoga are extensive, having a positive impact on every body system from gastrointestinal, to joint motion, hand-eye coordination and respiratory effectiveness.

## **Reiki**

Reiki (pronounced ray-key) is a Japanese word derived from rei, meaning "free passage" or "transcendental spirit" and ki, meaning "vital life force energy" or "universal life energy". It is thought to have originated Tibet several thousand years ago

Reiki seeks to restore order to the body where vital energy has become unbalanced. To do this, practitioners channel energy in a particular pattern. This energy encourages deep relaxation, destroys energy blockages, detoxifies the system, provides new vitality in the form of healing universal life energy and increases the vibrational frequency of the body. Most Reiki treatments do not involve actual

physical contact between the practitioner and the client. Usually, the practitioner holds his or her hands a few inches away from the patient's body and manipulates the energy field from there.

People who have experienced reiki report greater vitality, leading to relaxation and a stimulation of the body. In time, the natural processes of renewal and removal of toxins are enhanced and therefore more effective. This assists in ultimately opening up more of the body to the life energy and a greater capacity for healing.

## **Reflexology**

Reflexology is based on the principle that certain reflex points relate to the whole body. These points can be found in the feet, hands and ears and respond to pressure, stimulating the body's own natural healing process. This enables the body to progressively clear blockages and re-establish energy flows for better health.

As a therapy, reflexology is not invasive- only the feet, and / or hands and ears are involved. It is deeply relaxing, but at the same time energizing - all part of the balancing capacity. If you have reflexology therapy, you may feel you are being pampered, but the treatment will also have significant effects on the whole body. In particular, circulation, nervous and lymphatic systems are stimulated, helping to eliminate toxins and improve nutrient flow throughout the body.

Particular organs can also be worked on through reflexology. The liver, for example, corresponds to an area in the arch of the right foot.

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