



Multiple sclerosis - alternative therapies

The nerves of the central nervous system are sheathed in myelin, a substance that assists in nerve function. Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an incurable disease of the central nervous system that inflames the myelin and causes plaques or lesions to appear. The brain, spinal cord and optic nerves can be affected. The two principle aims of drug therapy for MS are to ease specific symptoms and hamper the progression of disease by shortening the attacks. The types of drugs used in treatment depend on a number of factors, including the form of MS a person has. There is a range of alternative therapies that can complement a person's medical treatment by helping to ease symptoms. However, caution should be exercised. Some treatments are beneficial, but others are

simply quackery and a waste of time and money. Be advised by your doctor and other health care providers.

Massage

There are various types of massage including Shiatsu, Swedish massage and acupressure. The skin is the largest organ of the body and is packed with nerve endings that respond to touch. Massage works by soothing the skin and relaxing tense muscles. Regular massages can help a person with MS to better manage muscle pain.

Massage is perhaps one of the oldest healing traditions. Many cultures - including the Ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Chinese and Indians - were convinced of the therapeutic properties of massage and used it to treat a variety of ailments. The skin is the largest organ of the human body and is packed with nerve endings. Massage works by soothing soft tissue and encouraging relaxation. Massage is especially effective in treating 'vicious cycle' complaints. For instance, a tension headache is often self-sustaining because the pain makes the sufferer clench the affected muscles even harder. This, in turn, creates more pain. A thorough neck and shoulder massage can release muscle tension and break the pain cycle.

A range of disorders

Modern studies have shown that massage can be used to successfully treat a variety of disorders, including:

- Anxiety
- Arthritis
- Back pain
- Chronic pain
- Constipation
- Depression
- Headache
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia

Deep relaxation

One of the immediate benefits of massage is a feeling of deep relaxation and calm. This occurs because massage prompts the release of endorphins, the brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) that produce feelings of wellbeing. Levels of stress hormones - such as adrenalin, cortisol and norepinephrine - are also reduced. Studies indicate that high levels of stress hormones impair the immune system.

Some of the physical benefits of massage include:

- Reduced muscle tension
- Improved circulation
- Stimulation of the lymphatic system
- Reduction of stress hormones
- Increased joint mobility and flexibility
- Improved skin tone
- Speedier healing of soft tissue injuries
- Heightened mental alertness
- Reduced anxiety and depression