



Complementary & Alternative Therapies

What are Alternative and Complementary Therapies?

Anyone who is thinking of trying alternative or complementary medicine, will be astonished by the number of different therapies there are to choose from.

Membership of the British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA) presently stands at 38+ Associations, (representing approximately 25,000 practitioners). Fifty basic therapies (or variations of them) are represented by 11 therapy groups. The BCMA lists amongst its objectives: *the promotion of improved standards of practice management, education and training and the integration of complementary medicine into orthodox healthcare.*

Alternative and complementary treatments are known as "holistic" as they treat the whole body, not just one part. The aim is to eradicate the cause of the problem, not just alleviate the symptoms.

Ideally, practitioners of alternative medicine should be trained to the same standards as registered medical practitioners, some, such as osteopaths and chiropractors, are licensed by parliament and are able to diagnose and take clinical charge of a patient. Practitioners of complementary medicine should work alongside osteopaths, chiropractors or other

registered medical practitioners, they should not diagnose, and control of the patient remains in qualified hands.

It is only possible to give a very short description of some of the most common therapies/treatments here.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is part of ancient traditional Chinese medicine, using fine, one-time needles inserted at precise points on the body to stimulate channels of energy running beneath the skin. The aim is to restore the body's natural balance and improve the overall well-being of the whole person. It may be used alongside conventional medicine. As individual response may vary, so may the number of treatments required.

Aromatherapy

The therapeutic quality of essential oils from flowers, herbs, trees and fruit, has been recognised for centuries in many countries. Aromatherapy uses these concentrated oils to promote relaxation and well-being. Massage is the most beneficial method of application, although the oils can be used in other ways, adding them to a bath or sprinkling some on a handkerchief to promote relaxation. Many people with tinnitus find aromatherapy a great help.

The oils are widely available, but care should be exercised as they are extremely concentrated. If you use them at home, always make sure you follow the instructions.

Chiropractic

All our organs and cells need nerve information to function correctly. Much of this information is passed through the spinal cord. Chiropractors aim broadly to correct the alignment of the spine and other joints of the body, to restore nerve function, to alleviate pain and promote natural health. Chiropractic treatment uses gentle manipulative techniques.

Craniosacral Therapy

A deep relaxing therapy during which therapists use their hands as "listeners" to find and release resistance in the tissues, bones and fluid of the body. The therapy works on what is known as the craniosacral rhythm which arises in the core of the body, in the brain and spinal cord and the fluids that bathe them. The purpose is to encourage the nervous system and its control mechanisms to achieve a greater balance and promote healing from within.

Homeopathy

"Homeopathy" is Greek for "similar suffering". Its aim is to treat "like with like", in the way that a vaccination works. The remedies are administered in such extremely diluted forms that they cannot cause any side effects, or become addictive. If you visit a homeopath, be sure to give details of any medication or supplement you are taking, or if you have had any recent dental treatment. Although homeopathic remedies are widely available, and are mostly harmless, it is wise not to

take them without supervision, some, if taken in large quantities, can be damaging.

Herbal Medicine (Herbalism)

Herbal medicine is one of the oldest forms of medicine known. Our ancestors found, by trial and error, the most effective plants to heal their illnesses and a large proportion of the world's population still relies on herbs for health.

Many of the pharmaceutical drugs we use today originated from plant constituents which were subsequently synthesised in the laboratory. Medical Herbalists are trained in the same diagnostic skills as orthodox doctors, but they look for the underlying cause of the problem and treat that, rather than just the symptoms.

Hypnosis

Essentially, there are two forms of hypnosis, both very different. The first is sometimes called "suggestion treatment" and consists of implanting behavioural suggestions in the patient's mind. The second is the use of hypnosis in psychotherapy (hypnotherapy) to aid recall in order to find and understand the cause of the patient's problem, and nowadays is probably the most widely practised form.

Massage

Massage enhances the sense of well-being; it increases self awareness and self esteem; it relieves stress and tension; it improves circulation of blood and lymph. Generally it makes you feel better. There are a number of types of massage, from very gentle to quite vigorous, some of which are described in these pages.

Osteopathy

This treatment is concerned in diagnosing and correcting faults in body mechanics (the musculo-skeletal system) ensuring that it is functioning efficiently, with minimum wear and tear. Osteopathy is now an accepted method of treatment, either on its own or in conjunction with medical or other treatment. It is a system of manipulation intended to re-align any structural deviations or abnormalities, but it can also involve stretching and massage. People who consult an osteopath for back pain, joint or muscle problems often find improvement in other quite unrelated conditions after treatment.

Reflexology

Reflexology is a method of treatment using massage to reflex areas found in the feet and hands. In the feet, there are reflex areas corresponding to all parts of the body and these areas are arranged in such a way as to form a map of the body in the feet. Reflexology does not claim to be a "cure all" but numerous different disorders have been successfully treated by this method including migraine, breathing disorders, digestive and circulatory problems, back problems, tension and stress. The treatment is relaxing and vitalising.

Reiki

Reiki is a Japanese word meaning "universal life energy". It has its origins in Buddhist teachings, but it is not a faith system. The therapist channels this "universal life energy" through his or her hands which are placed in different positions over the recipient's body, there is no pressure involved. The whole body is treated not just the parts where the

symptoms are manifesting. Reiki is said to help stress, insomnia, pain and depression, as well as many other ailments.

Shiatsu

Shiatsu, Japanese "finger pressure" therapy, is a natural healing discipline springing from the same ancient oriental principles as acupuncture. Like acupuncture, Shiatsu works by stimulating the body's vital energy flow (known as "ki" in Japanese).

Physically this has the effect of stimulating the circulation and the flow of lymphatic fluid, helping to release toxins and deep-seated tension from the muscles and stimulating the hormone system.

The following are just three exercise techniques that can be learnt and put into practice to help cope with the stresses and strains of modern life.

Alexander Technique

This technique aims to improve mind and body functions and help to prevent and alleviate, amongst other things: pain and stress, breathing problems, depression, anxiety and tension related problems, through changing the way we think about our every day life movements and posture. It is taught on a one-to-one basis and usually requires approximately 20 lessons.

Tai Chi

Tai Chi is an exercise art for people of all ages and is perfect for combating stress, increasing flexibility, improving circulation and maintaining all round good health. These days the healthcare aspects are foremost and principally revolve around the long, slow and graceful form of movement.

Energy building, breathing and postural exercises are also taught. The calming effect of Tai Chi has led it to being described as "moving meditation".

Yoga

Yoga is reputed to be some 6,000 years old and to have originated in India. Yoga is the ancient Indian Sanskrit word for "union" -its aim is to unite mind and body to work in perfect harmony. It is based on postures, breathing and meditation. The postures work on the body and are adaptable to each person's ability. Breathing exercises and meditation result in a calm mind and a relaxed body, giving a peaceful and contented feeling and an ability to face and overcome problems without worry and stress. Once you have had initial instruction, it is easy to continue at home.

Will any of these therapies help tinnitus?

The answer is that there is anecdotal evidence that some people have found some relief from one or other of the

therapies described, however, there is no guarantee, it's a case of trial and error and depends on how much you are willing to spend. If you decide to try any of them, keep an open mind and be positive. None of the treatments or regimes should carry any risk, in fact they should help your tinnitus simply because your overall health improves. A good therapist will spend time talking to you about yourself and your problems, time which your overworked GP can't spare, and this in itself can be very beneficial.

Remember to tell the complementary/alternative practitioner if you are undergoing any orthodox treatment, or taking any medication.

The Professional Advisory Committee of the BTA does not necessarily endorse this approach to the treatment of tinnitus.

Thanks to Harold Gaier of The Hale Clinic, London, registered naturopath, osteopath and homeopath for his assistance.

April 2006 – © British Tinnitus Association

This information is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP / medical professional

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