



## Complementary Therapies



### Overview

"Complementary therapies" refers to a broad group of natural and spiritual healing methods and approaches that are different from conventional Western medicine (or pharmaceutical medicine). Many of these healing methods have been used for centuries in many different cultures.

Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, a wide variety of complementary therapies has been used by people with HIV for various purposes, including general health promotion, relief of symptoms and cure of certain ailments. Some of the most commonly used complementary therapies are described below.

### Acupuncture

Acupuncture involves the insertion of extremely fine needles at specific points of the body to help stimulate and balance the flow of energy (called "Qi"). It has often been used to reduce general pain, headaches, neuropathy (burning, numbness and pain in the fingers and toes) and other symptoms related to HIV or side effects of HIV drugs.

### Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy uses essential oils from plants to treat illness and promote well-being. Oils are often diluted in hot water or added to massage oils and lotion for



Canadian AIDS Treatment  
Information Exchange  
Réseau canadien  
d'info-traitements sida

[www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca)



[www.apaa.ca](http://www.apaa.ca)

**Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.**

## **Complementary therapies overview**

use. Aromatherapy has often been used to reduce stress, fatigue and side effects of drugs.

### **Ayurveda**

Ayurvedic medicine originated in India and is one of the oldest known medical systems. It works to cure illnesses and achieve good health by restoring the balance of the harmony between mind, body and spirit. Treatment methods may include combinations of herbal medicine, dietary changes, meditation, internal body cleansing (using diet or medicine to get rid of the body's "toxins"), yoga and prayer.

### **Chiropractic Therapy**

Chiropractic therapy treats illnesses and relieves symptoms by manipulating the spine and muscles. It is most often used to reduce headaches, and back and muscle pain as well as reducing stress.

### **Herbal therapy**

Herbal therapies are part of every medical system, including Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine. It uses substances that come from different parts of plants as medicine to treat a variety of illnesses. The herbal preparation may be eaten, drunk as tea, smoked, inhaled or applied to the skin. It may involve a single herb or several herbs used in a mixture.

### **Homeopathy**

Homeopathy is based on the principle that "like cures like"; that is, substances that in large doses would cause symptoms of disease, in small doses, treat those same symptoms. Homeopathy medicines are natural substances in very small, diluted doses that can be used to treat a variety of symptoms.



## **Complementary therapies overview**

### **Massage**

Massage refers to the use of manipulation of muscle and body tissues using a variety of techniques such as rubbing, stroking, kneading or tapping. It is very effective in relieving stress, tension or muscle pains and stimulating circulation.

### **Meditation**

Meditation uses deep breathing and other techniques to help a person focus his or her thoughts. It is often practiced in association with spiritual beliefs and is part of many healing systems, including Ayurveda. It is often used to reduce stress, anxiety and headaches.

### **Naturopathy**

Naturopathy is based on the belief that the body has the natural ability to heal itself. It uses a variety of methods including herbs, diet, homeopathic remedies, massage and hydrotherapy to stimulate the healing ability of the person. It is most often used in HIV disease to enhance the health of the immune system.

### **Reflexology**

Reflexology is based on the principle that certain points on the hands and feet are connected to other parts of the body. Applying pressure to those points can treat symptoms and help stimulate healing of the corresponding body parts.

### **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)**

TCM originated in China and has been practiced for thousands of years. It believes that good health results from having harmony and balance between the body, the mind and the environment. It uses a variety of methods including acupuncture, herbal medicine, diet and exercises to regulate the flow of a person's life energies (referred to as "Qi") to treat illnesses and promote health.

Complementary therapies and Western medicine do not necessarily replace



## Complementary therapies overview

each other; in fact, often they support or "complement" each other.

It is important to tell both your Western medical care provider and complementary therapists about all the different kinds of treatments you are using. This will help them get a more complete picture of your treatment plan in order to maximize the benefits of the treatments and to prevent any harmful side effects or interactions between the treatments.

---

**Disclaimer:** The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) and Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA) in good faith provide information resources to help people living with HIV/AIDS who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE or APAA, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad a range of sources as possible. We strongly urge users to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

We do not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE or APAA. Users relying on this information do so entirely at their own risk. Neither CATIE, nor APAA, nor Health Canada, nor any of their employees, directors, officers or volunteers may be held liable for damages of any kind that may result from the use or misuse of any such information. The views expressed herein or in any article or publication accessed or published or provided by CATIE or APAA are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the policies or opinions of CATIE or APAA, or the official policy of the Minister of Health Canada.

**Copyright:** This Fact Sheet is made available through a collaboration between Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA), Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS) and the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE). Original content developed by ACAS, 2001. Translation into Swahili and Hausa by APAA, 2004.

This information is also available in Chinese, Tagalog and Vietnamese

Funding has been provided by Health Canada, under the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS

Supported by an unrestricted educational grant from GlaxoSmithKline in partnership with Shire BioChem



partnership  
in partnership with

