Complementary treatments

Complementary treatments may be used alongside epilepsy medicines. They don’t replace epilepsy medicines.

Some people tell us that they find complementary treatments can help their epilepsy. Other people with epilepsy want to try complementary treatments for things not related to epilepsy. This information explains what some of the most used complementary treatments are, and whether there is any evidence about their usefulness in treating epilepsy. It looks at whether these treatments can be good for general wellbeing. It also looks at whether they shouldn’t be used by someone with epilepsy.

These are some of the more commonly used of complementary treatments.

**Acupuncture**

Acupuncture is a treatment that involves having very fine needles put in particular parts of your body. These needles stimulate your nerves and muscles, which produces endorphins. Endorphins are natural pain-relieving chemicals, which can also make you feel good.

**Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy is a type of treatment that uses essential oils to improve a person’s health or mood.

**Biofeedback**

Biofeedback is a technique that involves using a computer programme to control bodily functions, such as breathing, heart rate or brainwave patterns.¹

**Herbal medicines**

Herbal medicines – these are used to treat a variety of different health conditions.

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There are lots of different types of massage but they all involve rubbing or stroking the head or soft tissues of the body, such as the muscles. Massage can help to reduce tension and pain, improve blood flow and encourage relaxation. Sometimes oils are used during massage.

**Reflexology**
Reflexology is a type of massage of the feet. It is based on the theory that different points on the feet, lower leg, hands, face or ears correspond with different areas of the body.²

**Relaxation**
Relaxation therapies are things that help you to relax. Different people find their own ways of relaxing and what works for one person might not work for another. Some of the things people have told us they do to help with relaxation are listening to music or relaxation tapes, going for a walk or doing gentle exercise such as some forms of yoga.

**Which complementary treatments have people used to be help with their epilepsy?**

- **Biofeedback** - a study of 18 people with epilepsy in Brighton showed that 3 people had their seizures reduced by more than half with a type of biofeedback³
- **Reflexology** – a study of 77 people showed that a number of people who had reflexology along with their usual epilepsy medicines, had fewer seizures than before.⁴
- **Relaxation** - can help to relieve stress. Some people have told us that lowering their levels of stress makes their seizures less likely. https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/stress

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Which complementary treatments help with general wellbeing?
Generally, these treatments don’t stop seizures, but can help improve your feeling of wellbeing, which, in a roundabout way, could help with your seizure control.

- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Reflexology

Which complementary treatments could be a problem for people with epilepsy?

- **Aromatherapy** - some aromatherapy oils should be avoided by people with epilepsy as they could make their seizures more likely. These include rosemary, fennel, sage, eucalyptus, hyssop, camphor and spike lavender\(^5\)
- **Herbal medicines** - there have been some reports that ginkgo biloba could trigger seizures in some people with epilepsy.\(^6\) And some herbal treatments, such as St John’s wort can interact with some epilepsy medicines. This would make them less effective\(^7\) and possibly lower the seizure threshold.\(^8\) This could make seizures more likely

Where you can find more information about different complementary treatments

**Acupuncture**
http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Acupuncture/Pages/Introduction.aspx

**Aromatherapy**
https://www.fht.org.uk/therapies/aromatherapy

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\(^7\) British National Formulary (BNF73) P1327. March-September 2017

Biofeedback
http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/biofeedback/home/ovc-20169724

Herbal medicines
http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/herbal-medicines/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Massage
http://www.therapy-directory.org.uk/articles/massagetherapy.html

Reflexology
http://www.aor.org.uk/home/what-is-reflexology

Relaxation
http://www.therapiesguide.co.uk/TG-therapy-guide-for-Relaxation%20Therapy.htm

About this information
This information is written by Epilepsy Action’s advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy, and medical experts. If you would like to know where our information is from, or there is anything you would like to say about the information, please contact us at epilepsy.org.uk/feedback

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

Our thanks
Epilepsy Action would like to thank Jane M Archibald, Sapphire Epilepsy Nurse Specialist at Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for her contribution to this information. Jane M Archibald has declared no conflict of interest.

Date: February 2018 Due for review: February 2021 Code: F153.01

Your support
We hope you have found this information helpful. As a charity, we rely on donations to provide our advice and information. If you would like to make a donation, here are some ways you can do this.
• Visit www.epilepsy.org.uk/donate
• Text ACT NOW to 70700 (This will cost you £5 plus your usual cost of sending a text. Epilepsy Action will receive £5.)
• Send a cheque payable to Epilepsy Action to the address below.

Did you know you can also become a member of Epilepsy Action from as little as £1 a month? To find out more, visit epilepsy.org.uk/join or call 0113 210 8800.

Epilepsy Helpline
Freephone 0808 800 5050, text 0753 741 0044, email helpline@epilepsy.org.uk, tweet @epilepsyadvice

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