

# Complementary Therapies

Living with epilepsy and managing its impacts often involves more than just gaining seizure control. Finding a good quality of life is important, and for some people this can be helped through the use of complementary therapies. However, it is important to remember that complementary therapies **should never replace use of anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs)**.

Stress, anxiety, and lack of sleep can be seizure triggers for some people with epilepsy. In some cases, the use of complementary therapies may have a positive effect on these symptoms, and therefore potentially help reduce seizure activity. Some common complementary therapies include acupuncture, massage, aromatherapy, relaxation techniques (yoga and meditation), homeopathy, and herbal medicine.

At this stage there is limited scientific evidence of the effectiveness of complementary therapy on epilepsy. However, some people living with epilepsy have reported that using complementary therapies has assisted them to achieve a better quality of life and feel it has assisted in seizure management. On the other hand, some people have had adverse reactions and increased seizure activity when using complementary therapies.

It is important to remember that complementary therapies cannot cure or control epilepsy, and it is a good idea to discuss any of these approaches with your doctor before using them. They are also not an alternative to your regular treatment approach, and you should not stop taking your anti-epileptic medication if you choose to pursue using complementary therapies as well.

## ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture, which is part of traditional Chinese medicine, uses needles and sometimes heat to stimulate nerve endings. The objective of acupuncture is to assist a person achieve better mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. If you want to use acupuncture, be sure to speak to your doctor about it and whether it may affect your seizure activity.

If you try acupuncture, be sure to let your therapist know that you have epilepsy, what medications or other medical treatments you use, and what to do in the event of a seizure.

## MASSAGE

Many types of massages are available. General massage therapy is offered by a masseuse, while manipulative therapy is provided by an osteopath or chiropractor. Massage is often used to reduce tension, assist with relaxation and minimise stress. As stress can be a seizure trigger for some

people, massage may have a relaxing and calming effect which may therefore assist in seizure control in some way. However, for some people a state of deep relaxation can have the opposite effect and trigger a seizure. If you want to start having massages, be sure to speak to your doctor about it and whether there is a chance it may affect your seizure activity.

If you try massage, be sure to let your therapist know that you have epilepsy, what medications or other medical treatments you use, and what to do in the event of a seizure.

## AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy uses pure essential oils from plants, usually selected for a range of effects including relaxation, stress reduction or to aid in healing. Aromatherapy therapists can select from a wide array of oils, with the type/s chosen to suit the purpose of the treatment. While many oils can assist with relaxation, others can have an opposite effect and actually act as a seizure trigger in some people.

Some of the oils that can trigger seizures include eucalyptus, fennel, hyssop, pennyroyal, rosemary, sage, savin, tansy, thuja, turpentine, and wormwood. If you want to try aromatherapy, be sure to speak to your doctor about it and whether it may affect your seizure activity.

If you try aromatherapy, be sure to let your therapist know that you have epilepsy, what medications or other medical treatments you use, and what to do in the event of a seizure.

## RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Some people use yoga and meditation to relax, unwind, practice mindfulness and reduce stress. Some people with epilepsy have found that relaxation techniques can ease tension and stress, and reduce stress-related seizure triggers. Like massage, some techniques can result in a state of deep relaxation, which for some people can actually trigger seizure activity. If you want to try relaxation techniques, be sure to speak to your doctor about it and whether it may affect your seizure activity.

If you try yoga, meditation or other forms of relaxation, be sure to let your therapist know that you have epilepsy, what medications or other medical treatments you use, and what to do in the event of a seizure.

## HERBAL MEDICINE AND HOMEOPATHY

Herbal medicine is easily accessed in pharmacies or through homoeopaths. Even though herbal medicines are often promoted as being 'natural' or as a 'dietary supplement', they may cause seizures because of negative interactions with AEDs.

Certain herbs should be avoided by people living with epilepsy, such as St John's Wort. Speak to your doctor about any herbs or herbal medicines you are interested in using.

## REGULATION OF COMPLEMENTARY THERAPISTS

The complementary therapy industry in Australia is largely self-regulated, with some exceptions. For example, chiropractors and Chinese medicine practitioners are required under law to receive formal recognition and meet minimum standards. While other complementary therapists can register with a professional body, this is generally voluntary and therapists are under no legal obligation to join.

This is important to be aware of, because professional bodies, such as the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) are responsible for making sure that clinicians have the appropriate qualifications to be practising and ensure that they are practising according to agreed-upon legal and ethical standards. If a therapist is not registered with a professional body, then it means that their qualifications and ongoing practice is not necessarily being monitored.

## REGULATION OF COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINES

Complementary medicines made in Australia are subject to strict product safety and quality regulations through the Australian Government's [Therapeutic Goods Administration](#) (TGA).

Medicines made in other countries may not be as closely monitored and assessed for safety and risk, so be careful purchasing any items made outside of Australia. Look for Australian-made products that are marked 'Listed Aust R' or 'Registered Aust R', which means these products were manufactured in a laboratory licensed by the TGA.