

ORGANIZATION NEWS

Information/Education Page

Complementary Health Approaches for People With Parkinson Disease



What is complementary and integrative medicine?

Complementary and integrative medicine refers to health care approaches developed separately from conventional Western medicine. Complementary means that it is used together with conventional medicine. Integrative means that it centers a full range of physical, emotional, and environmental aspects in a person's health. Approximately one-third of adults in the United States have reported the use of complementary and integrative medicine to improve health and wellness and relieve symptoms related to chronic disease.¹

Conventional medicine for Parkinson disease (PD) mainly focuses on treating motor symptoms such as tremors, slow movement, stiff muscles, and poor posture. In addition, some medical specialties such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology can provide treatments that manage beyond motor symptoms, but conventional medicine is often insufficient in managing all aspects of PD symptoms.² Complementary and integrative medicine has become more popular among people with PD who seek a holistic approach to manage disease symptoms and improve quality of life.³

Mind-body practice for PD

Mind-body practices include a majority of complementary and integrative medicine approaches for PD. The use of mind-body practices such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong have increased significantly in recent years.¹ These practices foster awareness of the connection between the mind, physical functions, and well-being.

Yoga

- Description: A practice that combines physical exercise based on asana (physical poses), breathing, and meditation. It was developed in ancient India.^{4,5}
- Benefits: Improvement of both physical and mental symptoms, such as gait, balance, flexibility, strength, fatigue, pain, anxiety, depression, and sleep.
- Level of evidence: High.

Tai chi

- Description: A physical exercise delivered through a series of gentle and flowing poses combined with deep breathing and meditation. Tai chi originated from the ancient Chinese martial art for self-defense.^{6,7}
- Benefits: Improved strength, balance, physical function, cognition, pain, anxiety, and depression.
- Level of evidence: Moderate.

Qigong

- Description: An ancient Chinese physical exercise combining deep breathing and meditation to improve vital energy flow in the body. Qigong shares some aspects of tai chi but is different in that qigong involves milder movements performed repeatedly.^{6,8}
- Benefits: Improved gait, muscle stiffness, balance, coordination, anxiety, depression, and sleep.
- Level of evidence: Moderate.

Music therapy

- Description: A therapeutic approach using music or any of its components (sounds,

harmony, melody, or rhythm) to promote physical, mental, and emotional health. Music therapy includes everything from simply listening to music (passive) to playing a musical instrument or physical activities with musical rhythm or cueing (active).⁹

- Benefits: Improved gait, motor coordination, anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep.
- Level of evidence: Moderate.

Meditation

- Description: A self-regulated practice focusing mind and sensory awareness. Mindfulness-based stress reduction, a type of mindful training using meditation techniques aimed at relaxation, is widely used in hospital settings. Additionally, multiple mobile applications are available to guide meditation, but there is lack of evidence for its effectiveness for PD.^{10,11}
- Benefits: Improved pain, stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep.
- Level of evidence: Low to moderate.

Relaxation and guided imagery

- Description: Guided imagination to achieve a relaxed state of mind and body. This practice uses your imagination to portray places, people, smells, or sounds that make you happy and relaxed.¹²
- Benefits: Improved slow movement, tremors, pain, and stress.
- Level of evidence: Low.

Body-based and external energy practice for PD

Body-based practices involve techniques stimulating points of the body, manipulative techniques, or adjustment of muscles, joints, and bones to improve structural and systemic body imbalance. External energy practices are used to bring energy into the body or facilitate the balance of energy within a body.

Acupuncture

- Description: A traditional Chinese technique stimulating strategic points on the body by inserting very thin needles through the skin.¹³

- Benefits: Improved motor symptoms and pain. More effective when combined with medications.
- Level of evidence: Moderate.

Manipulative practices

- Description: Joint manipulation techniques (eg, chiropractic treatment), soft tissue manipulation techniques (eg, massage, myofascial release), and postural/muscle retraining (eg, Alexander technique) are popular methods for manipulative practices.^{14,15}
- Benefits: Alexander technique: improved gait, tremors, stiff muscles, pain, stress, and depression.
- Level of evidence: Low to moderate.

Energy practices

- Description: Healing or therapeutic touch, Reiki, external qigong, magnet therapy, and light therapy are commonly used methods for energy practices.
- Benefits: Empirically believed to help symptoms, but there is lack of reliable scientific evidence.
- Level of evidence: Very low.

Considerations based on your PD symptoms

You may consider using the suggestions of complementary and integrative medicine approaches listed in [table 1](#) to improve your PD symptoms.

Safety precautions

You should consult with your health care providers before using any complementary and integrative medicine approaches. Because not all complementary and integrative therapists have adequate training for people with PD, you may consider asking advice from complementary and integrative physicians in your local area. Mind-body practices are generally known to be safe for older adults and for all fitness levels, but some practices may require a considerable amount of physical ability or may cause unanticipated adverse events. Some complementary and integrative practices that require body movements with moderate intensity may be less suitable for you depending on your PD status and severity.

Table 1 Considerations based on Parkinson disease symptoms

Treatment	Symptoms						Evidence Level*
	Stiff muscles, decreased flexibility, or shaking	Problems with walking, balance, or freezing	Pain	Stress or fatigue	Anxiety or depression	Sleep problems	
Yoga	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	High
Tai chi	✓	✓			✓		Moderate
Qigong	✓	✓			✓	✓	Moderate
Music therapy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Moderate
Acupuncture	✓		✓				Moderate
Meditation			✓	✓	✓	✓	Low to moderate
Manipulative practices	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Low to moderate
Relaxation and guided imagery			✓	✓			Low
Energy practices							Very low

* Evidence level is based on the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation system.¹⁶

You should clear your participation with your health care providers.

Additional resources

You can find more information about the use of complementary and integrative medicine in PD in the following links:

- National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (<https://nccih.nih.gov/>)
- Parkinson's UK-Complementary Therapies (<https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/complementary-therapies>)

Authorship

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