

FATIGUE TREATMENTS MAKING INFORMED DECISIONS



Fatigue treatments

In order to reduce fatigue, many people use a variety of treatments including both conventional and complementary medicine. While some people find these treatments effective, others don't. It is important to acknowledge however that there are no conventional or complementary treatments which have been proven to consistently reduce MS fatigue by reliable scientific research. The aim of this information sheet is to help you make informed personal decisions about conventional and complementary treatments and your health care.

Conventional and Complementary Medicine

Complementary medicine refers to treatments that are used in addition to conventional medicine.

Conventional medicine, also known as western medicine can be defined as treatments that are

evidence based, taught in medical schools and are able to be prescribed.

Complementary medicine can be described as treatment that has not originated from western science. Examples of complementary treatments include aromatherapy, some diets, vitamins and minerals, herbs and meditation.

Complementary treatments are commonly combined with conventional medicine by people with MS. These treatments are often used by some people with MS to enhance the effects of conventional medicine and to achieve a more holistic approach.

Understanding medications

Many people with MS are prescribed a range of medications. These medications can interact so it is important to understand what each medication aims to achieve and how it works. If you have any

questions or concerns regarding the combination of medications you may be using including conventional and complementary please talk to your pharmacist. If appropriate, a Home Medicines Review can be organised in your home which involves a review of all the medications you are currently taking.

Medications and fatigue

Although there are some conventional medications available which may help you to reduce fatigue there is no substantial scientific evidence for their success. For further information on these medications talk to your GP.

Additionally some medications prescribed for people with MS can actually cause or increase fatigue. For example, some analgesics, antidepressants, antihistamines and immune modulators can affect fatigue. For more information about whether the medications you are taking could be contributing to the fatigue you experience please talk to your GP or a health professional at the MS Society.

Will the treatment work for me?

When considering complementary treatment options it is useful to evaluate and address the reasons you have for wanting to use a complementary treatment. It is important to remember that specific treatments don't work for everyone.

You need to make a personal decision about the success of specific treatments based on your own experience.

It is also important to listen to and understand your body in order to monitor the effectiveness of individual treatments.

Why is Complementary Medicine controversial?

Complementary medicine is sometimes considered a controversial issue. This is largely due to the lack of scientific evidence available to support the use of complementary medicine. Most evidence for the use of complementary medicine is anecdotal consisting only of people's experience and perception of whether a treatment is successful.

Be informed

It is important to be as informed as possible before making any decisions about using complementary treatments. It is beneficial if information can be obtained from a variety of sources such as books, journals, the internet, people who have tried a therapy, and complementary health practitioners.

Remain cautious

It is vital to remain cautious when investigating possible complementary treatments as some may be harmful. The internet is a common place where treatments may claim to cure MS or provide relief from MS symptoms. However these are mostly untrue as there is no scientific evidence supporting their use for people with MS. It is essential to consider the effectiveness, safety and cost of all complementary treatments prior to decision making.

Facing different opinions

A study conducted by Thorne, Paterson, Russell and Schultz (2002) found that in some cases the participant's relationship with

their conventional health care practitioners became tense and strained when they raised the issue of combining complementary and conventional treatments. These participants described the importance of using a range of communication strategies with their conventional health care practitioners in order to discuss combining conventional and complementary treatment options.

Inform your doctor

It is important to inform your doctor of all the treatments you are currently taking including complementary medicines. It is also important to speak to your doctor before you begin taking any complementary treatments as these may interact with the other medications you are currently using.

Other fatigue management strategies

Additional information sheets are available covering a range of fatigue management strategies. These include [Fatigue Information Sheet](#), [Exercise and Diet](#), [Keeping Cool](#), [Managing Stress](#), [Fatigue Self Assessment](#), and [Planning Your Day](#).

Further Information

If you have any questions or require further information about MS fatigue and its management please contact your GP or health professional at the MS Society. Additionally if you would like to discuss the use of conventional and complementary treatments please contact a health professional at the MS Society.

The Society has more information sheets included in the symptom series as well as a Healthy Living and Managing MS Series. Please see the website for more details.

References

Bowling, A 2001, Alternative Medicine and Multiple Sclerosis, Demos Medical Publishers, New York.

Huntley, A & Ernst, E 2000, 'Complementary and alternative therapies for treating multiple sclerosis symptoms: a systematic review', Complementary Therapies in Medicine, vol. 8, pp. 97-105.

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