Complementary Therapies

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Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

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Complementary Therapies

Complementary/alternative/integrative therapies: health care treatments most often not considered part of conventional (Western) medicine
Complementary Therapies

• Using complementary therapies with standard medicines can help people living with HIV live longer, healthier lives; these therapies may
  – Ease side effects of HIV drugs
  – Boost the immune system
  – Improve overall health

• Important for people living with HIV to share any complementary practices with their providers to make sure they are safe with prescribed HIV drug regimen

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What are some common complementary therapies?
Acupuncture Practice developed in China thousands of years ago

- Small thin metal needles inserted into skin at points on the body to remove blockages in the flow of qi, the life force or vital energy
- Studies show benefits
- Acupuncture can be helpful for pain, headache, nausea, diarrhea, menstrual cramps, menopausal symptoms
- In the U.S., many states require acupuncturists to be licensed; be sure acupuncturist uses only disposable, sterile needles
Aromatherapy

Use of essential oils for emotional/physical health

• Oils are inhaled or rubbed into skin

• Generally used to
  – Reduce pain
  – Improve mood
  – Promote relaxation

• No strong evidence for immune-boosting effects

• Talk to your health care provider before using any essential oils
Biofeedback

• Trains people to control some of the body's operations that usually occur without our having to think about them, such as:
  – Breathing rate
  – Heart rate
  – Blood pressure

• Connecting to devices that measure actions and watching measurements on a monitor

• Most often used to help people with headaches and pain

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Homeopathy

Activates the body's own healing abilities by:

• Giving small doses of diluted substances in a tincture
• Based on the idea that "like cures like"
  – Remedies made from small amounts of a variety of plants, minerals, and animal products – crushed, dissolved in liquid
• Results of scientific studies of homeopathy are mixed
• People most often use homeopathy to treat:
  – Allergies, asthma, ear infections, digestive disorders
• US FDA regulates these remedies, but does not evaluate their safety or effectiveness
Hypnosis

- Trained therapist uses techniques to help individuals:
  - Become deeply relaxed
  - Enter a different state of consciousness called a **trance**
  - Body relaxes; mind becomes more focused
  - Therapist makes suggestions for behavior change or symptom relief
- Hypnosis can help reduce stress, relieve anxiety, ease pain
  - Used to treat eating disorders, addictions, phobias, insomnia, digestive problems

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Massage Therapy

• Practiced for centuries around the world
• Trained therapist uses their hands to physically handle the body's soft tissues and muscles to:
  – Relieve muscle tightness
  – Improve circulation; clear waste products
  – Boost immune system
  – Reduce stress; help you relax
• Massage therapists in the U.S. are licensed
• Pregnant women should be cautious about getting massages
Mind-Body Techniques

• Enhance mind's ability to affect bodily functions and symptoms

• Achieving deep relaxation can help ease stress, renew the body; techniques include:
  – Meditation, mindfulness, guided visualization, yoga, Tai Chi

• Studies suggest:
  – Mindfulness meditation may prevent CD4 cells from decreasing when a person living with HIV is under stress
  – In small study, transcendental meditation improved quality of life of those living with HIV; longer study planned
Herbs and Dietary Supplements

- May include herbs, Chinese herbs, foods and vitamins
- Important to discuss all herbs and supplements with provider to prevent interactions with HIV drugs
  - St. John's Wort, herbal treatment for depression, affects how PIs and NNRTIs act
  - U.S. FDA recommends people taking any type of HIV drugs **NOT** take St. John's Wort
- Most supplements in the U.S. are not regulated by the FDA
Complementary Treatment Considerations

• Providers consider health and wellness factors including:
  – Medical history and other conditions
  – Lifestyle
  – Support systems

• Tailored program for each patient, may involve:
  – Diet change; nutritional changes
  – Vitamin and mineral supplements
  – Digestive health treatments
  – Physical activity and exercise
  – Stress reduction

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Remember, talk to your provider about any complementary treatments before you use them!

- Medical community is increasingly recommending complementary therapies for many types of conditions
- NIH has developed a department called The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) dedicated to the study of these treatments
• To learn more, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
  – Complementary Therapies
• For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  – www.thewellproject.org
  – www.facebook.com/thewellproject
  – www.twitter.com/thewellproject