

the**well**project

Complementary Therapies

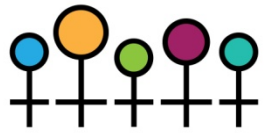
Last updated: December 10, 2025

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

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

#thewellproject

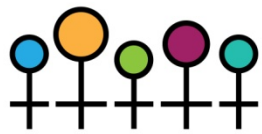


thewellproject

Complementary Therapies

Complementary/alternative/integrative therapies: healthcare treatments usually **not considered part of conventional (Western) medicine**

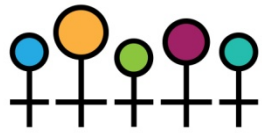




the**well**project

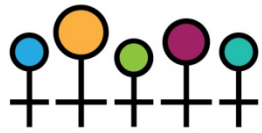
Complementary Therapies

- 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 talk to their providers before starting any complementary practices to make sure they are safe with their HIV drug regimen



the**well**project

***What are some common
complementary therapies?***



thewellproject

Acupuncture

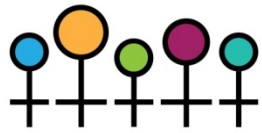
Practice developed in China thousands of years ago

- 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
- Can be helpful for pain, headache, nausea, diarrhea, menstrual cramps, menopausal symptoms
- Many U.S. states require acupuncturists to be licensed
- Be sure acupuncturist uses disposable, sterile needles

Aromatherapy

Use of **essential oils** for emotional/physical health

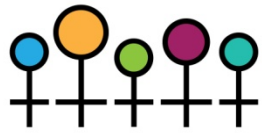
- Oils are inhaled or rubbed into skin
- Generally used to
 - Reduce pain
 - Improve mood
 - Promote relaxation
- No strong evidence for immune-boosting effects
- Talk to your healthcare provider before using any essential oils



thewellproject

Biofeedback

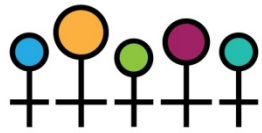
- Trains people to **control some of the body's operations that usually occur naturally**, such as:
 - Breathing rate
 - Heart rate
 - Blood pressure
- Connecting to devices that measure actions and watching measurements on a monitor
- Most often used to help people with headaches and pain



the**well**project

Cannabis

- Can be inhaled, eaten/drunk, applied to skin
- May help with
 - Anxiety
 - Appetite
 - Pain
 - Inflammation
- Can also worsen mental health disorders!
- Can interact with HIV drugs – *talk to your provider!*
- May be illegal where you live
- Smoking itself is bad for your health

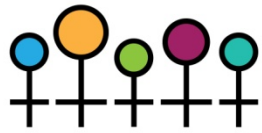


thewellproject

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"
- Results of scientific studies of homeopathy are mixed
- People most often use homeopathy to treat:
 - Allergies, asthma, ear infections, digestive disorders, headaches, menopausal symptoms
- US FDA regulates them, but does not evaluate their safety or effectiveness
- Talk to your provider before using homeopathic remedies



thewellproject

Hypnosis

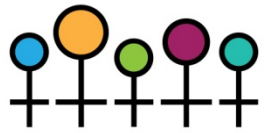
- Trained therapist uses techniques to help individuals:
 - Become deeply relaxed
 - Enter a different state of consciousness called a **trance**
 - Body relaxes; mind becomes more focused
 - Therapist makes suggestions for behavior change or symptom relief
- Hypnosis can help reduce stress, anxiety,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

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 certified
- Pregnant people 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 help people living with HIV who are under stress
 - In small study, transcendental meditation improved quality of life of those living with HIV; longer study planned



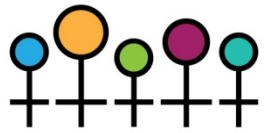
the**well**project

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 two classes of HIV drugs - PIs and NNRTIs - act
 - People taking any HIV drugs should **NOT** take St. John's Wort
- In the U.S., most supplements are not regulated by the FDA
- Talk to your provider before taking any supplements

Chiropractic Care

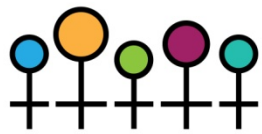
- Chiropractor manipulates spine or joints to relieve
 - Headaches
 - Pain in back, neck or shoulders
- May also recommend
 - Exercises
 - Changes to daily activities
- Make sure chiropractor is properly licensed!
 - US State Board of Chiropractic Examiners
 - American Board of Chiropractic Specialties



the**well**project

Complementary Treatment Considerations

- Providers consider health and wellness factors including:
 - Medical history and other conditions
 - Lifestyle
 - Support systems
- Tailored care plan for each patient, may involve:
 - Diet change; nutritional changes
 - Vitamin and mineral supplements
 - Digestive health treatments
 - Physical activity and exercise
 - Stress reduction

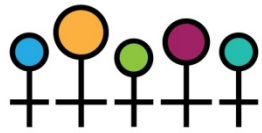


the**well**project

Conclusion

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



the**well**project

Learn More!

- 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
 - [@thewellprojecthiv.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@thewellprojecthiv)
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv/
 - www.threads.net/@thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv