



Alternative approaches

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Complementary and alternative approaches

We use the term “complementary approaches” to mean anything that falls outside of mainstream healthcare, and for which there is a registered body.

Traditionally, this includes approaches such as acupuncture, homeopathy, aromatherapy, reflexology, breathwork, and reiki.

Mindfulness is also a complementary approach that is becoming more widely used by people with ME and long Covid.

A number of ME-specific “alternative approaches” that claim to improve symptoms have been independently developed, often bringing together elements from a number of fields of study, and frequently based on anecdotal rather than published, peer-reviewed evidence.

Examples include the Lightning Process, the Chrysalis Effect, Mickel therapy and reverse therapy.

We urge you to view with extreme caution any approach which claims to offer a cure and/or significant improvement, has not been adequately researched and published with peer-review, by peers with expert subject knowledge, and requires the payment of large sums of money.

Other people with ME may recommend a particular approach that has helped them. While this can be helpful in considering the options available to you, please remember that you should **only take medical advice from an appropriately qualified healthcare professional.**

It’s your decision, and yours alone, which approaches you try, and which you don’t.

You should never be pressured into trying an approach you feel strongly against or be dismissed for wanting to try an approach that you believe might be of value to you.

Please remember that no-one, including you and the practitioner offering it, can be certain how you might benefit (or not) from a particular approach.

They can vary substantially from practitioner to practitioner, and people with ME differ, sometimes greatly, in their response.

Our 2019 Big Survey of more than 4,000 people with ME found that 46% of people who tried an alternative approach to help them manage their symptoms.

The approaches most people said they have tried are rest (92%) and pacing (88%).

Exploring whether an alternative approach is right for you

Some treatments may interact so should not be taken together. Check with your doctor if you're not sure.

The practitioner should also inform your regular GP or specialist of any tests or treatment.

It can also be useful to set a budget before starting treatment and stick with it.

If you are thinking of seeing an alternative practitioner, we recommend you ask them the following questions:

1. What are your qualifications? Always use a qualified therapist who belongs to a professional body. Most professional bodies will have a code of conduct which their members must follow. Ask what qualifications they have, and which registered body they are affiliated to. Check that they have professional indemnity insurance. You could also contact the professional body to help you find a practitioner in your area.
2. What experience do you have with people with ME? How many people with ME have you treated recently? What have their outcomes been? Do you keep a record/audit of treatment responses?
3. How much will it cost? What are the usual minimum, maximum and average costs of treatment over time? Ask specifically about the cost of tests, drugs or supplements. Explain that you would like to know about all possible costs before starting any treatment. Do they offer any concessions to patients on low incomes?
4. Can you meet my health needs? When you are making your choice of practitioner you might want to think about your particular health needs. For example, if you use a wheelchair, is there good access? If you are sensitive to strong perfumes, do they use air fresheners or other products which may cause you discomfort?

The Lightning Process

The Lightning Process is a commercial training programme that is promoted by practitioners as a cure of treatment for ME, without due evidence, offering psychological management, neurolinguistic programming and osteopathy.

Action for ME supports recommendation 1.12.27 in the 2021 NICE guidelines on ME/CFS that says:

"Do not offer the Lightning Process, or therapies based on it, to people with ME/CFS."



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