



for multiple

*Accelerating research towards a
cure for multiple sclerosis*

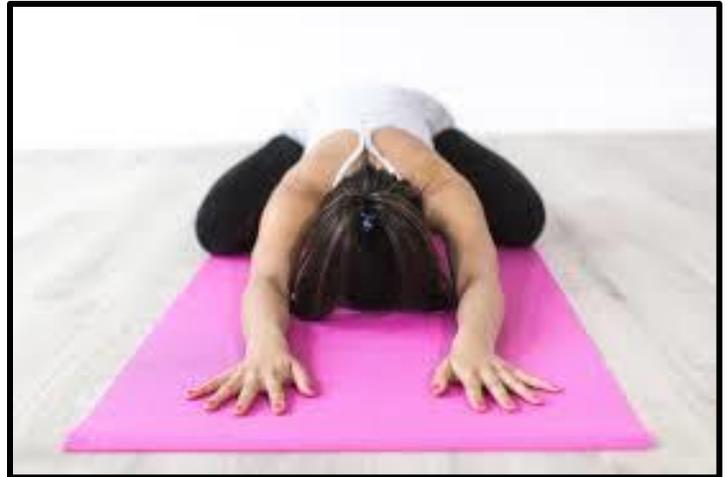
Alternative Medicine – Is it right for you?

A variety of medications are used to treat multiple sclerosis (MS). Sometimes people with MS turn to other treatments to manage their symptoms and increase their quality of life, most often in combination with their prescribed MS treatments.

[Acupuncture](#) is an age-old healing practice of traditional Chinese medicine in which thin needles are placed at specific points on the body. It's primarily used to relieve pain but also has been used to treat other symptoms. The goal of acupuncture is to release the flow of the body's vital energy or "chi" by stimulating points along energy pathways. This is thought to release natural painkillers, and may boost blood flow and change brain activity. Acupuncture needles are very thin, and most people feel no pain or very little pain when they are inserted. Some people report relief of symptoms like pain, muscle spasms, or bladder control problems, however there is no scientific evidence that it works for people with MS. If you decide that acupuncture is right for you, it's important to see a licensed acupuncturist for your treatments. If you are afraid of needles, you may be able to get much of the same benefit from [acupressure](#). Acupressure involves pressing or massaging the acupuncture points to stimulate energy pathways.

In addition to being important to general health and well-being, some types of exercise can be helpful in managing MS symptoms by lowering stress, helping you relax, and increasing your energy, balance and flexibility. Exercise doesn't have to be rigorous to provide

benefits. You don't need to belong to a gym or health club. Many exercises can be done at home and modified if they cannot be done in the 'traditional' way (for example, using a hand cycle instead of stationary bicycle, or exercising while sitting down). Any physical activity done on a regular basis (walking, gardening, or even cooking) has been found to reduce stress and improve physical and mental health. Practicing [yoga](#) can help increase core strength and flexibility, while providing



relaxing benefits that are helpful for releasing tension. Yoga combines poses with proper breathing and thought processes to bring peace to the mind, body and spirit. Every pose can be simplified and can be practiced in a variety of positions for those who may be less able. Most yoga studios offer different styles and levels of classes. [Tai Chi](#) is a martial art that combines slow, deliberate movements, meditation and breathing exercises. This can help restore your energy, balance, and alignment. Tai Chi is said to be gentler than yoga. Many of the positions can be done while sitting. As with any fitness program, check with your doctor before you start. An exercise program needs to fit your capabilities and limitations and may need to be adjusted as changes occur in MS symptoms. Be aware that any exercise can elevate the body's core temperature and temporarily aggravate MS symptoms. Periods of exercise should be carefully timed to avoid the hotter periods of the day and prevent excessive fatigue. Some find that exercising in water is especially beneficial. Water helps people with MS move in ways that they may not be able to on land, and keeps them cool while they are exercising.

Relaxation and stress management are important for managing MS symptoms. Everyone manages stress differently. In general, keeping a positive attitude and minimizing stress producers in your life can help you feel better. Sharing your thoughts and feelings can help relieve stress. Joining [iConquerMS™](#) or the [iConquerMS Smart Patients community](#) are ways to participate in groundbreaking research and connect with others to share feelings and opinions; and, perhaps, help you see stressors in a new light. Managing expectations is

important in managing stress. MS is changeable and flexibility in expectations is the key to keeping stress levels low. Many people with MS get regular [massage therapy](#) to help them relax and reduce stress. Others find that [meditation](#) greatly decreases the stress in their lives. Meditation is often incorporated into the practice of yoga, as the physical poses of yoga prepare the body to sit in stillness for mediation. There is no single, correct way to meditate. Walking can be a form of meditation. Knitting, gardening, observing nature or any other activity that causes you to narrow your focus can be meditative. The benefits of meditation may address many of the issues faced by people diagnosed with MS without the use of medication.

Although there's no special “MS diet,” what you eat can make a difference in how you feel. MS specialists recommend that people with MS follow the same high fiber, low fat [diet](#) that is recommended for all adults. Different diets have been proposed as treatments (for example, the [Swank diet](#)), or even cures, for MS symptoms. Most have not been studied adequately, and the few that have been studied have produced mixed results. Several herbal remedies and vitamins are said to be beneficial in managing MS symptoms. It is well known that [vitamin D](#) promotes calcium absorption for strong bones. However, recent research also suggests Vitamin D may play a role in [myelin repair](#) and [protecting the brain](#) in people at risk for developing MS. [Biotin](#), sometimes referred to as Vitamin B7 or Vitamin H, is one of the B complex vitamins. Biotin is found in many foods, such as brewer's yeast, nuts, egg yolks, Swiss chard, and liver. [Several studies](#) on the use of high levels of biotin as a treatment for people with progressive MS have shown positive results. It is important to note that these are preliminary studies and that not every person who took part in the studies saw the same degree of improvement. More research is needed to determine who might benefit from this approach. There is some evidence that taking [Evening Primrose oil](#) (linoleic acid) may slightly improve MS symptoms. Linoleic acid can be found in sunflower seeds and safflower oil.

There is much controversy surrounding the therapeutic use of [marijuana](#) for MS. Some people with MS say that smoking or ingesting marijuana brings relief of many MS symptoms. However, scientists aren't clear on how it works and who should use it. Marijuana is a complex substance that may contain many different components affecting the body. Production of marijuana for medical use is not standardized or regulated, therefore the effects of different batches of marijuana may not be the same. While many people are

using marijuana, the FDA still hasn't approved it as a treatment because there haven't been enough studies to prove that it's safe and effective. This research is necessary to understand whether or not the benefits of marijuana use outweigh its many side effects. If you live in a state where medical marijuana is legal, it's important to consult with your doctor about the use of marijuana in your particular situation.

Many people with MS turn to [music therapy](#) for management of their MS symptoms. Not only does music have calming effects, but it can also improve memory and lessen depression. Doing repeated movements to a rhythmic beat can improve coordination and concentration; and, in turn, also affect endurance and improve one's walking gait. Verbal communication may also benefit from music therapy. Words that are hard to verbalize can sometimes be easily communicated when put to music.

Pet therapy is a form of treatment where animals are used to improve a patient's condition. The most common animal used is a dog, but others including cats, horses, dolphins and farm animals are also used. [Studies have shown](#) that the use of animals can calm anxiety, lower blood pressure, reduce pain, and change mood. The [Therapy Dogs International](#) and the Delta Society's [Pet Partner's](#) program both focus on pet therapy. It is common for therapy animals to visit health care facilities and libraries. [Studies have also shown](#) that having a pet at home can reduce multiple sclerosis symptoms, if the patient is able to take care of the pet or has caregivers that can help with the pet.



The treatments your physician prescribes for you are the ones that have been evaluated in controlled clinical trials or accepted by the MS medical community as safe and effective therapies. In contrast, most alternative treatments have undergone very little (if any) scientific study to evaluate their safety and effectiveness. Some may be completely safe for a person with MS while others may actually pose significant risks. Some may provide benefit for a person with MS while others offer no benefit at all. When considering alternative treatments, it's important to find out what the treatment is, what's involved and how it works. It's also important to ask about side effects, risks, effectiveness and cost. Talk with your doctor before you start any new therapy. Together you can decide what will help you feel your best (whether the benefit of the therapy outweighs the risks). It's important

to keep your physician informed about what you take (or what is done) and any changes you experience, this will allow your doctor to alert you to possible side effects or drug interactions.

Talking to others who have used the therapy may also help with this decision. Your doctor may also be able to give you information on other patients who may have tried the same therapy that you are considering. It's also important to research the provider's background. Find out about their credentials and how long they've been offering the treatment. Be sure that the provider is willing to work with your doctor and be fully informed about the total cost of the treatment (most are not covered by insurance). Be wary of outrageous claims and "secret" formulas (make sure all ingredients are listed).

New surveys on diet, wellness, and complimentary approaches to REAL MS will be added to [iConquerMS](#) at the end of August. If you haven't already done so, please [join](#) and share your information about your treatment and experiences. The research enabled by this information is the key to better understanding the safety and effectiveness of many of these alternative therapies.

