Complementary Therapies

Many people living with psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis explore complementary therapies alongside the treatments recommended by their healthcare professional. Complementary therapies cover a wide range of approaches, from physical and mind-body therapies to herbal and homeopathic remedies, dietary approaches and other practices intended to support health and wellbeing.

Examples include acupuncture, massage and reflexology, reiki, meditation and other relaxation techniques, hypnotherapy, chiropractic and osteopathy, aromatherapy, herbal remedies and vitamins or supplements as well as non-prescribed topicals. Aromatherapy oils should be used with caution, as applying them to the skin may cause irritation or an allergic reaction.

Some people find that particular approaches help them to relax, manage stress, relieve muscle tension or pain, or improve their general wellbeing. Others may be interested in whether a complementary therapy can improve their psoriasis itself.

What does the evidence say?

As with conventional treatments for psoriasis, people can respond differently to complementary therapies. What one person finds helpful may not be helpful for someone else.

Research into complementary therapies for psoriasis is limited, and the quality of studies varies. Some approaches have shown possible benefits, but there is often not good-quality evidence to recommend them as treatments for psoriasis. Other approaches may be helpful for general wellbeing, relaxation, stress management or other symptoms associated with living with psoriasis.

The evidence for different complementary therapies varies considerably. This information sheet looks at some of the approaches that people with psoriasis may consider and summarises what is currently known about their potential benefits and risks. The aim is to help you make an informed decision about whether a complementary therapy approach may be right for you.

Psoriasis UK, Dick Coles House, Queensbridge, Northampton, NN4 7BF
Telephone: 01604 251620 **Email:** mail@psoriasisuk.org.uk
Website: www.psoriasisuk.org.uk
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Complementary therapies should be used alongside, rather than instead of, treatments recommended by your healthcare professional. If you are considering a complementary therapy, particularly if it involves taking a medicine, herbal remedy or supplement, or if you have other health conditions or take prescribed medicines, it is important to discuss this with your healthcare professional or pharmacist first.

Types of Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies take many different forms. Some are intended to support relaxation and wellbeing, some involve physical therapies, and others involve taking or applying something. The sections below provide information about some of the approaches that people with psoriasis may consider.

Herbal Remedies

Herbal remedies are made using plants or parts of plants like liquorice root. In the case of psoriasis, this can include topical treatments such as **Aloe Vera**, **Oregon Grape Root (Mahonia aquifolium) Cream** and **Neem Oil** as well as medicines that are taken orally.
The NHS does not use herbal medicines, but some complementary therapies may be available on the NHS for certain conditions.

There are entire systems of herbal therapy that can be followed, such as **Traditional Chinese Medicine**, **Western Herbal Medicine** and **Ayurvedic Medicine**, which often also incorporate elements of spiritualism and diet into the therapy. However, extreme care must be taken when using these substances, especially if the label is not in English. The MHRA has investigated reports into the use of mercury, lead, and arsenic in unlicensed Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese medicines.

It is important to look for a Traditional Herbal Registration (THR) number on all herbal remedies, as this means that the product is registered with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), a part of the UK government's Department of Health and Social Care and so has met UK standards of quality and safety.

Herbal medicines can also react with some medications, so it's important to tell a healthcare professional about all herbal medicines or supplements as they can interfere with the absorption of medicines they are prescribing and can impact things like kidney or liver function.

This is particularly important if you are taking any of the following:

- Statins
- Anti-depressants
- Medicine for diabetes, such as metformin

- Medicines for high blood pressure, such as ramipril
- Blood thinning medicine, such as warfarin
- Hormonal contraception, such as the combined pill

Homeopathic Remedies

Homeopathy is based on the use of highly diluted substances, made from plants, animals or minerals that aims to stimulate the body's natural defences.

There is no good-quality evidence that homeopathy is effective in treating psoriasis. If you choose to use a homeopathic product, speak to your pharmacist or healthcare professional, particularly if you are taking other medicines.

Further information on homeopathy can be found at:

- **Society of Homeopaths** - www.homeopathy-soh.org
- **Alliance of Registered Homeopaths (ARH)** - www.a-r-h.org
- **Homeopathy UK** - https://homeopathy-uk.org

Mind/Body Therapies

Research has looked at links between psoriasis and psychological factors such as stress and emotions. Anxiety and depression affect up to 25% of patients with psoriasis and can sometimes be overlooked by healthcare professionals looking at the physical symptoms of psoriasis. It is important to tell your GP how your psoriasis makes you feel.

Stress is also recognised as a trigger that can cause psoriasis to flare or worsen in some people. As a result, some believe that reducing stress and promoting relaxation may help improve physical symptoms by supporting overall wellbeing.

Therapies that teach relaxation, wellbeing and stress reduction techniques include:

- **Counselling**
- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy**
- **Meditation, Aromatherapy**
- **Floatation**
- **Hypnotherapy**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Breathing / relaxation techniques**
- **Yoga**
- **Tai chi**

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Therapies such as Counselling and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy can be available via the NHS, with a referral from your GP or Dermatologist.

Do discuss these options with your healthcare professional if you think they may be beneficial, or if you are finding it difficult to cope.

Physical Therapies

Physical therapies involve the manipulation of the body's muscles, joints, and soft tissues. Common examples include massage, physiotherapy, acupuncture, acupressure, chiropractic, and osteopathy.

Massage and Acupressure (a type of massage in which finger pressure on specific body sites is used to promote healing and relieve fatigue) are often used as relaxation therapies, to release tension in certain areas of the body.

Chiropractic and Osteopathy, are primary healthcare professions that use physical manipulation to increase joint mobility, relieve pain and muscle spasm, and enhance blood supply. These may be particularly helpful to patients with psoriatic arthritis, and, again, may be available on the NHS with a referral from your GP or Rheumatologist. Chiropractors and osteopaths must be registered by law.

Before choosing a private therapist, make sure they're registered with a professional organisation that's been accredited by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA).

You can check a practitioner on the PSA website.

Diet and Nutrition

Research is growing to show that what we eat may play a role not only in managing symptoms, but also in supporting our overall health and any related conditions. Many people believe that certain foods can lessen or worsen their psoriasis or trigger a recurrence. There is no specific diet proven to cure psoriasis. However, eating a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight can support overall health and may be particularly important because psoriasis is associated with an increased risk of some other health conditions.

If you think your diet may be affecting your psoriasis, you might try keeping a food diary alongside notes on your symptoms. This should help you notice any patterns.

A balanced diet with 5 portions of fruit or vegetables per day is still the healthiest option and many people also choose to follow a traditional Mediterranean diet based on vegetables, fruit,

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pulses (e.g. beans, lentils and chickpeas) cereals, nuts, seeds and fish. Further resources on the importance of maintaining a healthy diet are available from Psoriasis UK.

You should aim for variety with your fruit and veg intake and try to include some fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi and kombucha. Fibre rich whole grain foods such as oats, brown rice and wholemeal pasta can also help while oily fish and turmeric are known for their anti-inflammatory properties.

It is important not to alter your diet drastically without speaking to your GP first.
Some websites may claim that certain supplements or vitamins can cure or relieve psoriasis. At present there is no evidence to support this. Vitamin D is sometimes discussed in relation to psoriasis as research suggests that some people with psoriasis may have low Vitamin D levels. If this is relevant to you, your healthcare professional can discuss whether this is appropriate.
As with herbal medicines, if you do decide to take a supplement, you should consult your GP or pharmacist first to ensure it will not interact with your current treatment.

It is also advisable to buy supplements from a reputable or well-established retailer with a valid THR number, to be sure of the ingredients.

General advice

There are also more general things that people with psoriasis can do to help with their psoriasis including:

- Trying to avoid the things that make your symptoms worse (triggers)
- Eating a healthy, balanced diet
- Getting regular exercise
- Reducing stress
- Limiting how much alcohol you drink
- Stopping smoking

Safety

The level of regulation and evidence varies between different complementary therapies. Some medicines and herbal products are subject to specific safety and quality requirements, while other therapies and practitioners may be regulated differently or may operate on a voluntary registration. Some products have been found to contain undisclosed ingredients such as steroids, others can react with prescribed medications or irritate broken skin, and some may not be suitable for those with easily reactive skin. It important to discuss this with your healthcare professional first.

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If you are considering a herbal remedy, supplement or other product

Take care to ensure you do not put yourself at risk:

- Check for a Product Licence (PL) or Traditional Herbal Registration (THR) number on the label of the product. These are granted by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to herbal medicines that have met the required standards for safety and quality.

- Herbal medicines marketed in the UK generally need to have appropriate authorisation, such as a PL or THR. A THR number will begin with 'THR', followed by nine digits (for example, THR 123 456 789). If a herbal medicinal product does not have a PL or THR number, it has not been assessed by the MHRA as a licensed or registered herbal medicine. This means there may be less assurance about its ingredients, quality and safety, including information about possible side effects.

- The MHRA offers two ways to verify if a THR number is active, official, and legally registered in the UK. One of these is the MHRA products portal https://products.mhra.gov.uk/. It also maintains a Live THR Registry List which you can access via the GOV.UK Herbal Medicines THR List page.

- The terms herbal or natural do not mean safe. Certain plants can still be poisonous to humans, especially children or those with impaired immune systems.

- Herbal medicines could also interact with any other medicines you are taking. It is therefore important to discuss any herbal medicine with your healthcare professional or pharmacist before taking it, and to stop using it immediately if you experience any side effects.

- Be wary of products claiming to be miracle cures, 100% safe or claiming to have no side effects. You should also use caution if a product does not offer a list of ingredients, or if its label is not printed in English. Remember that even if it has been granted a licence in another country, this does not mean it will meet UK standards of quality and safety. Remember that when buying online you have no way of knowing for sure that the ingredients in the product are the same as those on the label.

- Be cautious about websites and social media adverts that make strong claims about psoriasis treatments. Take extra care if they:

    - Pressure you to buy quickly, for example by saying they are moving warehouse or have limited stock

- Claim they have ordered too much stock and need to sell it quickly
- Use “before and after” photos
- Use testimonials as “proof” that the product works

- Online advertising can be targeted based on what you have searched for or viewed recently. This means you may see the same advert many times, but this does not mean the product has been recommended by a healthcare professional or shown to work for psoriasis.

- Children, the elderly, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need to be particularly careful, as the safety of many complementary therapies have not been established for these groups. People with impaired kidney or liver function should also be cautious when it comes to taking herbal or homeopathic medicines.

Choosing a Practitioner

If you are considering seeing a complementary therapy practitioner

- If you choose to see a complementary therapy practitioner privately, you can check whether they are registered with a professional body accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA).
  16-18 New Bridge St, London, EC4V 6AG
  info@professionalstandards.org.uk
  020 7389 8030

  You can check registered practitioners on the PSA website
  www.professionalstandards.org.uk/

- Check the **Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)** register www.cnhc.org.uk to find a practitioner in the complementary therapy of your choice. The CNHC is an independent UK regulatory body set up with government funding and support. It is a voluntary register, accredited by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA).
  The CNHC can be contacted via PO BOX 482, Bexleyheath, DA7 9QB, www.cnhc.org.uk on 020 3327 2720 from Monday - Friday between 9am and 5pm or info@cnhc.org.uk.

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If you have an adverse reaction:

- Discontinue the treatment immediately and seek appropriate medical attention , such as consulting a Pharmacist, your GP, contact NHS 111 (or NHS 24 if in Scotland), or, if the reaction is serious, visiting a hospital.
- Report the reaction to the MHRA's Yellow Card Scheme at https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk , by emailing info@mhra.gov.uk or by calling 0800 731 6789

For more information on Complementary Therapies and Licensed Medicines:

- **NHS website – Healthy Living Section** and www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/herbal-medicines-and-complementary-therapies/
  This section of the NHS website has lots of information on the various types of complementary treatments, evidence, and how to find a practitioner.

- **Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)**, info@mhra.gsi.gov.uk, 020 3080 6000 (weekdays 9am to 5pm).
  10 South Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London E14 4PU

The information in this resource is not intended to replace that of a healthcare professional: If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment, do discuss this with your doctor and always read the patient information leaflet to make sure you are using it correctly.

For more information, or for a list of resources used in producing this information sheet, please contact Psoriasis UK.

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