

Coping with Liver Disease: Alternative Treatments

People are increasingly using alternative treatments to help improve their health. In most cases, there is not enough research to determine whether these treatments really help people with liver disease.

If you are considering alternative treatments, please follow these recommendations:

- ▶ **Always check with your doctor or provider:** Your doctor or provider can tell you how much is known about an alternative treatment. Most importantly, they can also tell you if an alternative treatment is known to be safe.
- ▶ **See an expert:** It is a mistake to use any treatment, even something that is called an herb or supplement, without expert advice. Talk to people who have seen the alternative treatment expert in the past to be sure the person has a good reputation. Ask about his or her education, licenses, and certificates.
- ▶ **Beware of false promises:** Avoid alternative treatments that promise to cure your liver damage. Also, avoid any alternative medicine or product that is not available in the United States or that costs a lot of money or that is sold online.

IMPORTANT: USE HERBAL REMEDIES, SUPPLEMENTS, VITAMINS, AND OTHER “NATURAL” MEDICINE CAREFULLY.

Certain herbs, supplements, and mega vitamins can be very dangerous for people with liver damage. Your liver plays an important role in breaking down these medicines. If your liver is damaged, many herbs, supplements, and mega vitamins can harm it even more. Just because a medicine is said to be natural, that does not mean it is safe.

While the above warnings apply in every case, here are some ways people with liver disease use alternative treatments.

Talk with your doctor if you would like more information about any of these alternatives:

- ▶ **Aromatherapy:** Aromatherapy is based on the idea that certain smells can improve the way you feel. People use aromatherapy to reduce stress or to help with fatigue. Always talk with an expert before buying or using these oils or other substances yourself.
- ▶ **Massage therapy:** There are many different types of massage. Massage helps people relax and can also help reduce muscle pain, back pain, headaches, and soreness. Massage therapists are licensed in many states. Ask your doctor to recommend someone if you want to try massage therapy.
- ▶ **Meditation and visualization:** Meditation and visualization are common tools for coping with pain and stress. Some people say that meditation helps them cope with having liver disease. If you are interested in meditation, there are many books, videos, tapes, and classes that can help.
- ▶ **Yoga:** Yoga is an ancient set of exercises that is often combined with meditation. Yoga helps many people improve their fitness, reduce stress, and increase their flexibility. Some kinds of yoga are gentle enough for people with liver damage. Talk with your doctor if you are interested in yoga. Also, be sure to tell your yoga teacher that you have a liver disease.

Who can I contact for more information?

Call your local VA medical center and visit the Veterans Affairs Viral Hepatitis Web site at: <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Toll-Free Information Line at: 1-888-4 HEP CDC (1-888-443-7232)



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