

The Benefit of Alternative Medicine for Dementia

According to [Alzheimer's Disease International](#) There are currently around 44 million people with dementia worldwide. It generally affects the older population, but for some it can start before the age of 65.

The mainstream treatments that are available can only offer symptomatic relief and many of the pharmacological interventions have serious side effects; which makes it worthwhile to look into alternative methods of treatment. One of the most important issues is the associated behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia because they can cause considerable stress to the caregivers and are a major factor in dementia sufferers becoming institutionalised. These symptoms range from delusions, hallucinations, anxiety and depression, to negativism, agitation and wandering.

AChE inhibitors are currently one of the most commonly used pharmacological treatments for dementia. In research, they have been shown to produce moderate improvements in cognitive function in people with dementia. However, these improvements were coupled with a higher frequency of adverse events.

Memantine is another drug commonly used in the treatment of dementia. It has been shown to have a small, but clinically detectable and beneficial effect on functional and cognitive decline.

Antipsychotics are frequently prescribed to treat dementia related psychiatric problems. However, even with only 10 to 12 weeks of taking these drugs, severe adverse reactions such as mortality and cerebrovascular accidents have been observed. Furthermore, extrapyramidal symptoms such as falls, tremor and slurred speech are common side effects, and as a consequence, there are recommendations in both the United Kingdom and in the United States of America to exercise severe caution when using these drugs in patients with dementia.

The current conventional treatments for dementia can only offer moderate improvements in cognitive function and at best offer a slowing in the rate of decline in patients. The associated behavioural and psychological symptoms are important factors in the treatment of dementia and the antipsychotics that are prescribed to deal with these symptoms can have very serious side effects. There is currently no mainstream alternative that rivals these treatments, which is why they are still frequently prescribed.

Alternative Treatments

[Aromatherapy](#) has been shown to be an effective treatment for some of the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, such as agitation, sleeplessness, wandering and anti-social behaviour.

Interestingly, regular physical exercise has been shown not only to decrease the rate of functional decline in elderly patients with dementia, but also to reduce carer

stress. Astonishingly, in people who [exercise 3 or more times per week](#), the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's disease can be delayed. The Third Canadian Consensus Conference on Diagnosis and Treatment of Dementia (2006) recommends physical exercise for people with mild cognitive impairment, to prevent the progression to dementia.

[Chinese medical herbs](#) have shown promising results in the treatment of dementia, but are currently under-researched. The benefit of treatment with Chinese herbal medicines is not only that they have shown positive results, but that there are either no side effects, or very minor ones such as: constipation or nausea.

Other [recommended treatments](#) are:

- Acupuncture
- Herbal Medicine
- Music and/or dancing therapy
- Psychosocial therapies
- Dietary Supplements