Complementary Therapies for Physical and Mental Health

Complementary therapies, like massage, yoga, acupuncture, and reflexology, can provide a relaxing and beneficial option for individuals who have worked in high-stress, physically demanding professions.

These therapies can offer an alternative path to enhancing health and wellness by promoting relaxation, boosting circulation, and aiding the body's natural healing mechanisms. They are increasingly acknowledged for their ability to complement conventional medical treatments and can be advantageous for complaints including chronic pain, stress, anxiety and insomnia.

According to the World Health Organisation, complementary medicine is increasingly being used by people with chronic health conditions with one study showing a 50% increase in acupuncture treatments reported between 2012 and 2022. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines recommend physical therapy, psychological therapy and acupuncture to help people manage chronic or persistent pain.

The British Acupuncture Council (BAcC) provides high-quality evidence in the form of robust clinical trials conducted under strict conditions examining the acupuncture treatment of many painful conditions such as osteoarthritis, nonspecific back and neck pain, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome and gout, and concludes that they may all benefit from acupuncture.

Associated therapies in the use of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) acupuncture such as moxibustion (the burning of Chinese Mugwort, Artemisia Argyi, to warm parts of the body), cupping (the application of a small cup to the skin using suction), tuina and gua sha massage have also been shown to have positive results in helping people to manage chronic pain, and afford additional benefits such as improving joint range of motion, improving sleep, fatigue and mood.

The concept that the health of the mind and body are inextricably linked has contributed to the growing awareness of the role that acupuncture plays in mental health. The physical and mental tolls experienced during a career in policing can contribute to the development of stress, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, the experience of dealing with traumatic incidents can lead to the development of PTSD.

So, how can fine, hair-like needles help? An acupuncturist uses Chinese Medicine theory to select certain points on the body, which when needled, provide positive health effects. These effects increase regulation of the nervous system, positively impact emotional control, improve memory processing, and reduce stress. It also stimulates neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin. Treatment may also benefit the following, linked symptoms: Night sweats, Muscle tightness and tension, Insomnia, Fatigue, Digestive problems.

If you are affected by mental health difficulties, it is crucial to seek support. The Police Treatment Centres run a Retired Officer Wellbeing Programme which aims to provide tools and techniques to cope with the symptoms of mild to moderate anxiety and depression. Alongside access to group workshops, support classes, fitness and lifestyle classes and facilities, the programme is supplemented by therapies such as Indian head massage, reflexology and hot stone massage.

Complementary therapies can be used as an allied form of therapy, to complement those offered by Police Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres. Community clinics may utilise auricular (ear) acupuncture, permitting the treatment of several individuals at the same time. Past pop-up clinics have proven incredibly successful, giving support to those affected by 9/11 and the Grenfell Tower fire. Whether in private sessions or community clinics, acupuncture offers a safe and supportive treatment option for those struggling with mental health issues.

It is advisable to conduct thorough research when selecting a complementary therapy practitioner. Regulatory bodies specific to each therapy can help you ensure that the clinicians are both suitably qualified and safe to practise. The Professional Standards Authority (www.professionalstandards.org.uk) oversees the regulation of healthcare professionals and organisations in the UK and it is advisable to establish that your practitioner and / or their organisation are registered and have the appropriate licences and insurance.

Regulatory bodies include:

British Acupuncture Council (www.acupuncture.org.uk)

Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (www.aacp.org.uk)

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (https://www.cnhc.org.uk)

By embracing a holistic approach to health and well-being, individuals can discover the benefits of complementary therapies in promoting overall wellness.



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