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COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN CARE




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NATURAL THERAPIES FOR RESIDENTS IN AGED CARE

During my time as a beauty therapist treating older clients, I have also incorporated natural therapies that have included aromatherapy, herbal applications, massage, colour therapy and reflexology, especially face and hand reflexology. There are many other alternative therapies that are possibly compatible with illnesses or disorders of the eyes or skin listed below, but I will mention those that I have practised and others that I have known to help. Although I do not teach Tai Chi, I have found it to be a very good therapy for my arthritis and I have seen residents in a nursing home enjoy a session of Tai Chi with the occupational therapist or a Tai Chi instructor. Music therapy has also been known to help calm many an agitated resident, especially if it is music with which she is familiar. In fact, I have found some of the music being played to residents while I am treating a client to be very soothing and relaxing, especially 'old time' tunes ranging from the decades of the 1920s through to the 1960s. Familiar music will often motivate a resident to sing along with the tune. It is also encouraging to see performing artists visit the homes and entertain the residents. Many enjoy the sing-along.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE (PD)

Parkinson's disease is a neurological illness named after Dr James Parkinson, a London physician who was the first to describe it in 1817. PD is a disorder caused by the gradual loss of cells in a small part of the brain called the *substantia nigra*. The death of these

cells produces a reduction in a vital chemical called dopamine, which causes symptoms that may include:

- shaking of hands
- slowing down of movement
- stiffness
- loss of balance
- loss of facial expression
- speech impairment
- difficulty swallowing
- handwriting difficulties
- urinary problems
- constipation
- dry skin
- depression.

Parkinson's disease is a progressive disorder, and these symptoms worsen with time (Parkinson's Study Group 2009).

Beauty therapy tips for people with Parkinson's disease

Clients with PD can enjoy beauty therapy, especially a manicure or a facial. When giving a manicure, if the client is seated in a chair, the therapist can put a pillow or cushions covered with a clean towel over the client's lap and have her rest her hands on top of the pillow. If the client's tremors are severe, roll up a hand towel or face flannel (resembling a sausage) and place the client's hands over the towelling roll. This helps to settle the tremors. Hold each finger firm and file the fingernails. Do not use any scissors for cutting the fingernails if the client's tremors are severe.

Do not use nail varnish with PD clients as the strong fumes can be overpowering for most.

Natural therapy tips for the therapist

I have found that, when I treat PD clients, their tremors settle when I give them head and face reflexology. The clients relax and enjoy the therapy. When I give a manicure, I incorporate hand reflexology that helps to settle the shaking in the client's hands. Do not use strong fragrant oils as they can cause the person to become more agitated. I have seen this happen and the client's tremors can become worse, especially when the oils have been placed in front of her or applied to her skin.

Sweet almond oil and calendula oils have proved to be reasonably safe when treating older persons irrespective of their illness or skin disorder. However, always patch test a client before using any essential oils.

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

The term cardiovascular disease (CVD) refers to any heart and blood vessel disease, including high blood pressure, stroke, heart failure, peripheral vascular disease (which often occurs in older people, mostly affecting lower limbs) and deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

Heart disease

Heart disease is any disorder that affects the heart's normal functioning. The condition is a chronic one affecting both genders. The coronary arteries (those that supply the heart muscle with oxygen) become clogged with 'plaque', a fatty substance. Plaque accumulates gradually on the inner lining of the arteries, narrowing them. This is called atherosclerosis, and basically means the blood supply to the heart muscle is reduced due to narrowing of the arteries, which often leads to angina. In the

narrowed artery a clot of blood forms, blocking supply of blood to parts of the heart. This can cause a heart attack.

Beauty and reflexology tips for clients with a heart disorder

The lunula in the fingernails can show a pink to reddish hue in clients with heart disorders including high blood pressure. The nails can be either thick, or thin. However, with some clients the nails have a tendency to chip, fray and remain short. Careful consideration must be given when giving a manicure. Do not use nail varnish. (See more on caring for the nails in Chapter 4.)

CEREBROVASCULAR DISEASE (CD) (STROKE)

CD or a stroke occurs when the supply of blood to the brain is suddenly disrupted. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries. Blood may stop moving through an artery because the artery is blocked by a blood clot or plaque, or because the artery breaks or bursts.

A stroke is not just an 'old age' disease, it can happen to anyone at any time. The way in which people are affected by stroke depends where in the brain the stroke occurs and the size of the stroke. For example, someone who has a minor stroke may only be affected with a few side effects. On the other hand, someone who has a major stroke may be left totally paralysed on one side, or in a coma, or may die due to the extent of the stroke (Stroke Foundation 2007).

Important tips for the therapist

A person may be on anticoagulants (a range of medicines including aspirin) to help prevent blood clots. Should a client be on any blood-thinning medication and she bleeds, it can take longer for her wound to stop bleeding and heal. This is why it is

important for the therapist to know this, because of the nature of waxing procedures and some manicure procedures, especially if the client has thin skin. Besides treating many clients with dementia, I have also treated a number of stroke sufferers who can experience dementia. Some clients have been as young as 39. Most of the clients I have treated ranged from 50 through to their 80s.

Beauty therapy and hand reflexology tips for stroke clients

To give a manicure use the 'roll' towel to place in the affected hand with the fingers coming over top of the roll this will help to relax any trembling. If the affected hand cannot be immersed in a bowl of warm water for soaking, use a warm wet towel that has been soaked in water with an antibacterial solution. Make sure the hand and skin between the fingers are washed and dried thoroughly. The hand can become infected with a fungal or a bacterial infection through careless hygiene procedures if it is not properly cared for. Leaving the hand moist without regular cleansing is a common cause of infections. The fingernails on the affected hand may be very weak, with the fingernail curving over the nail pad on the finger. The nail may look white, and if the lunula is absent it may be a sign of anaemia or malnutrition. I have observed that the skin on stroke sufferers can be very dry and often scaly. Their sensitivity can be very high and some women may not be able to cope with any form of waxing procedures although most others can. This is why it is always important to patch test on clients with skin disorders and ill health.

Natural therapy tips for stroke clients

Many of my clients who have had a stroke can cope with some natural therapies such as massage, aromatherapy and, especially, face reflexology. I have found that many clients relax, and they tell me they feel 'so good' after the treatment. Most like having

their face touched. I have seen a few clients react with a 'high' sensitivity showing a bright red colour to their skin from strong fragrant aromatherapy oils, so it is best to keep it simple and only use a base oil like sweet almond, which has proved suitable for most people.

ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is often referred to as a single disease. In fact, it is an 'umbrella' term for many medical conditions that affect the musculoskeletal system, specifically joints where two or more bones meet. While there are about 100 forms of arthritis, the three most significant are:

- osteoarthritis
- rheumatoid arthritis
- gout.

Besides these three, there are other common forms of arthritis:

- ankylosing spondylitis
- juvenile arthritis
- systemic lupus erythematosus (lupus)
- scleroderma.

(Better Health Channel 2013a)

Osteoarthritis commonly develops from the age of 45, although it can occur in younger people. Many people have symptoms as they age, such as stiffness, joint pain and muscle weakness. Osteoarthritis has a reputation of being a disabling disease. While some people suffer from constant pain, others are only troubled by joint stiffness from time to time. The areas that are most affected are:

- the hands – usually the end finger joints
- the spine – in the neck and lower spine

- hips – older people are most at risk
- knees – may be caused by an old injury.

(Better Health Channel 2013d)

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic disease, mainly characterised by inflammation of the lining, or synovium of the joints. It can lead to long-term joint damage, resulting in chronic pain, loss of function and disability. It is the second most common arthritis after osteoarthritis (Healthinsite 2008).

Gout is a common form of arthritis caused by the build-up of a waste product, uric acid, in the bloodstream. Normally uric acid is dissolved in the bloodstream and filtered out by the kidneys and excreted in urine. Build-up of uric acid may settle in the joints in the form of crystals, causing inflammation and pain. This is called gout. The joint of the big toe is the first site to be affected; it becomes red and swollen and can be extremely painful. The other areas to be affected are the joints of all the toes, knees and ankle (Better Health Channel 2013b).

As an arthritis sufferer myself, I find it is very hard to get started in the morning as it can take a few minutes before I can manoeuvre myself from a lying position into a sitting position and move up to a standing position. This is because my knee joints, legs and back are painful and stiff. I am most seriously affected with stiffness and pain on very cold days or on very hot days. I can empathise with many of my clients who suffer from some form of arthritis. What most arthritis sufferers have in common is that they can feel very tender on any part of their body when they are being touched, especially when they are in pain. When the joints are affected they can become swollen and, in some people, they can become disjointed especially in the finger joints making the hands look enlarged and disabled. The fingernails have a tendency to dry out and the nail plate can become either hard or brittle with furrows, and the free-edge of the nail tends to split and fray. The skin has a tendency to become dehydrated and,

because of this, itching is common among those who have a dry or dehydrated skin. Itching also leads to inflammation and rashes if left unattended. Tiredness, exhaustion and depression are common symptoms associated with arthritis sufferers. Because of all the underlying problems that go with arthritis, it is best for the therapist to work carefully when treating the skin, hands and fingernails of a person with arthritis.

Natural therapies for arthritis sufferers

I have found foot reflexology beneficial for my pain. Other therapies that have helped arthritis sufferers are exercise, Tai Chi, acupuncture or acupressure. I do not think acupuncture would be advisable for frail older persons, but a few of my clients, colleagues and friends have said that they have had acupuncture and found it helped, whereas others said it did not help them. Like Western medicine, not all natural therapies will benefit everyone. It is a matter for the individual to find what suits her best, and how she responds to a therapy.