

**Supportive and Palliative Care Neurology Clinic**  
***Complementary Practices and Activities***

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“We cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose.” – Viktor Frankl

This resource booklet designed for the Neurology Supportive and Palliative Care Clinic, drafted by UCH Spiritual Care Services, provides a brief overview of some alternative and complementary mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual practices/activities that help reduce stress, increase resilience, and improve quality of life.

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### **Developing Resilience and Enhancing Coping Skills**

“Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors.”

– American Psychological Association

Some creatively describe resilience as the ability to bounce back, to remain flexible like a rubber band under stress or to bend like a tree branch in the midst of the storm. Resilience is not a characteristic trait that some people have or do not have; rather, cultivating resilience is a learned ordinary process and something anyone can develop by adapting behaviors, thoughts, and actions.

Others think of resilience as a “battery” which may be of a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional source. When our batteries are low or empty, we don’t have much energy or none at all to draw upon to manage feelings, problem solve, make clear decisions, and respond well in both challenging and every day experiences. Just as we need daily nourishment of food for our bodies, it may be helpful to think of providing similar daily nourishment and renewal for other dimensions of our lives.

Emotional stress is common in people who are experiencing chronic and serious illness. Feelings of fear, anger, resentment, frustration, anxiety, grief, sadness, and guilt tend to deplete our energies. Many of these same emotions and others may also run in the background of our thoughts without us being overtly aware of them, draining our body and mind sometimes affecting our heart rhythms by increasing stress, and further pressing us into debilitating emotional and physical states.

Engaging in proven complimentary activities and alternative practices may help reduce stress, and boost our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energies. When we are functioning with higher internal resources, when we can adapt various ways in which we spirituality-mentally-emotionally-physically “experience” our illness, we may better effectively regulate our emotions to avoid overreacting, improve the clarity of our thinking to problem solve, modify and adapt our responses, enlarging our capacity to prepare, engage and recover after a challenging event.

Extra copies of this booklet may be found at Neuro-Palliative Care website:

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschoo/departments/neurology/clinical/palliativecare/patients/Pages/Resiliency%20and%20Coping.aspx>

### **Mental & Spiritual Practices**

- **Meditation** – is a mental exercise that is used to help people inwardly draw on their life experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Many people have found that purposefully relaxing the mind may help decrease pain, reduce stress, worry, and anxiety. Sit quietly in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and relax your body and muscles. Focus on your breathing. Relax your thoughts. Let your body relax. Some people meditate on specific issues or topics, some try to meditate on nothing, while others may meditate on simply “what is” letting thoughts and sounds naturally drift into their mind like clouds drifting in the sky.
- **Mindfulness and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)** – Mindfulness practices have been shown to reduce excessive negative thoughts, self-criticism, feelings of worthlessness, and guilt. MBSR, a specific form of mindfulness, combines meditative techniques with psycho-education in order to improve the capacity to cope with physical stress, self-criticism, unmet needs, difficult emotions, and challenging relationships. Through meditative techniques people improve their inner thought life and self-awareness, as they explore both the causes of their suffering and engage the possibility to find peace whether or not their actual physical circumstances change. John Kabat-Zinn writes of the aim of MBSR, “...helping people live each moment of their lives – even the painful ones – as fully as possible.” MBSR interventions are designed to teach one to become more aware of, and relate differently to, thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. This includes developing awareness of our own judgments of our body movements which can be particularly helpful for those struggling with movement issues. MBSR programs are offered through some Integrative Medicine clinics and retreats centers. After participating in MBSR programs, many persons report improved physical and psychological symptoms, improved creative problem solving skills, and increased sense of peace.

*Mindfulness and Sleeping* – Some have found that developing bedtime rituals are helpful to enable them to relax physically and emotionally.

- Take time to prepare for sleep with self-care, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual techniques and practices.
- Maintaining a regular sleep pattern helps you brain get into a schedule. Try to go to bed and get up at about the same time every day, including on weekends and plan on 7-8 hours of sleep.
- Consider making your room a device-free zone and maintain quiet. Avoid, as possible, exposure to light-emitting devices, like laptops, phones, TVs and computers for at least 30 minutes before going to sleep. Others may benefit from devices, as some find listening to relaxing meditative music, guided mediation or soft sounds may help them ease into sleep.
- Some people benefit from making their bed a place of sleep and intimacy only, avoiding TV watching from their bed and no reading in bed (read and watch TV in other rooms); others find these activities may help them generate sleepiness, so they enjoy reading in bed. Find what fits for you.
- Taking naps during the day may be hard to resist, if taking a nap try to keep it to 30 minutes or so, as the more you sleep during the day, the more it may impact your sleepiness at night.

## Information for patients and families *Neurology Supportive and Palliative Care Clinic*

- Get regular exercise during the day, it will help with sleep. If possible, avoid excessively exercising within 2 hours of going to bed.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as slow/deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, prayer, and yoga postures (e.g. lying flat with palms up).
- Be mindful of what and when you eat before sleeping. Some recommend not eating 3 hours before bed to allow for proper digestion. Watch your caffeine intake, especially several hours before you plan to sleep.
- If you do wake up during the night, first find ways to meditatively relax lying in bed. If you cannot fall asleep or if you need to – get up and do something quietly (read a book), then try to sleep again.
- During the Winter, especially when there is less sunlight, our bodies may produce more melatonin which is a hormone that helps regulate sleep-wake cycles. In this instance, we sometimes feel like sleeping more even though we don't need to. You may want to try an “artificial light box” to help adjust your body clock. Our brains respond to the amount of light we take in during the day, especially natural sunlight, and some have found it helpful to regulate sleep by spending their day in ample sunlight, and retreating to a dark bedroom at night.
- Create an atmosphere that promotes sleep in your bedroom, comfortable temperature, and maximizing your environment for optimal comfort (consider comfort of mattress, pillows, etc.).

*Mindfulness and Eating* – Increasing our attention towards what we eat (e.g. nutritious, natural, well balanced meals) as well as how we eat has been practiced in many cultures and faith traditions as a way to help one respect food and promote important self-care for their own bodies and the environment.

- Some people use ceremony with particular plates or bowls, which may help to build appreciation, and develop self-awareness.
- Some use very formal ways to meditate during eating (Oryuki), while others briefly pause and offer thanksgiving prayers, chants, or reflections before eating.
- Slowing down, silently chewing the food with conscious intention, and savoring one's meal (e.g. colors, smells, textures) can promote important self-awareness, respect for food, and enrich one's inner life.

*The San Francisco Zen Center* includes these helpful reflections, modify or adapt these to make them fit for you:

We reflect on the effort that brought us this food and consider how it comes to us.  
We reflect on our virtue and practice, and whether we are worthy of this offering,  
We regard it as essential to keep the mind free from excesses such as greed.  
We regard this food as good medicine to sustain our life.  
For the sake of enlightenment, we now receive this food.

- **Prayer and Centering Prayer** – Prayer is a common spiritual and cultural practice, where persons draw inwardly and outwardly to their emotional and relational life with God, one another, what transcends them, the sacred within and/or around them. So much could be said about prayer and there are various ways to pray (written prayers, spontaneous, individually, group prayer) yet common aspects of prayer may include an expression of adoration or appreciation towards God or the sacred or something meaningfully greater than oneself (humanity, family, friends, the universe); confession of

one's shortcomings and failures alongside expressions of forgiveness for themselves and those who may have hurt them; expressing thankfulness and gratitude; and offering requests, intercessions, and hopes for oneself or others perhaps alongside of acknowledging concerns, naming feelings, struggles, and fears.

Attitude in prayer is essential, as persons are transparent and honest with themselves, attempting to remain receptive to change, open to discerning and developing their internal thought life, and working with ways to surrender and yield themselves particularly to what is not in their control.

Some persons use written prayers, follow devotional prayer books, use labyrinth prayer sheets (moving their finger through the labyrinth while they pray), and/or prayer beads or other instruments to add meaning, increase their focus, and/or maintain discipline. Some have found repeating common prayers that remind them of spiritual principles are helpful. One such common prayer is the *Universal Serenity Prayer*,

(God) May I find the serenity of mind to accept the things about myself and circumstances that can't be changed, the strength and courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Similar to a meditative practice and MBSR, centering prayer is a receptive method of silent contemplative prayer that prepares one to experience God or the sacred within and around us. Centering prayer adds depth of meaning to one's inner life and may help facilitate the movement from more active modes of prayer (verbal, mental or affective prayer) into a receptive prayer of resting in God, a Higher Power, or the sacred.

- **Slow and Deep Breathing** – may help you manage tension in your body and mind. Focus on slowly expanding your diaphragm and finding a timed rhythm in your breathing. Some people find it easier to slow their breathing more so that than taking deep breathes while others focus on both slow and deep breathing; do what feels good to you. Some people breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Some mentally focus on the heart to stimulate healthy heart rhythms. Others may breathe into one nostril (use your fingers to close the other nostril) and breath out through the other nostril (now use your fingers to close the other nostril), then switch, going back and forth. Some use breathing combinations between the nostrils and mouth. Some also focus on belly breathing and find it relaxing to take breaths expanding and contracting the belly. Others incorporate combinations of prayer, meditation, and intentional focus on body parts in breathing using a variety of forms (e.g. focusing on the heart, breathing in peaceful and appreciative emotions, breathing out fearful and anxious feelings). Focusing on one's breath may help with blood pressure stimulating relaxation, and may decrease anxiety, frustration, and anger.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** - may help with decreasing muscle tension and reducing stress. Starting at one end of your body (e.g. your toes) move progressively to the other end (e.g. your head), focusing on and relaxing certain muscle groups along the way. Many people alternate tightening muscle groups and then releasing them a few times. Consciously relaxing the body and mind is an effective and simple way to reduce stress.

- **Biofeedback** – combines progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, and meditation by using the one's mental power to create awareness of what is going on inside the body for the purpose of improving one's health. A growing number of biofeedback programs coordinated by licensed biofeedback therapists use technology and techniques such as electromyography (EMG) biofeedback, temperature (thermal) biofeedback, galvanic skin response training, and heart rate variability biofeedback to gain information about the body while providing training to help one gain some control over one's symptoms.
- **Guided Imagery** – uses your imagination to induce a calm feeling by accessing memories and mentally visualizing (e.g. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) certain experiences and scenic places. For instance, imagine walking on the beach and feeling the warm sand between your toes, hearing the waves crash against the shore, the warmth of the sun on your skin. Try to replace painful and uncomfortable thoughts by focusing on pleasant thoughts and experiences. One may use computer apps, purchase audio or video files with scenic views and soft relaxing meditative music or access free Internet videos (e.g. YouTube) on guided imagery to help with the practice.
- **Loving-kindness Meditation and Smiling Meditation**– is another form of meditation and may be considered a prayer practice that specifically focuses on extending compassion to oneself as well as love and connection to others. For example, lie on your bed or sit comfortably. Imagine family members or close friends smiling at you, hugging you, extending grace to you. Now, you extend them love and appreciation, see yourself smiling at them.

Another example, after entering into a state of relaxation, focus on expressing gratefulness for your body parts, starting from your toes to your head. Thank your toes and feet for what they have done for you today, thank your legs and knees, your hips, your heart and lungs, your stomach, your arms and shoulders, your hands, your neck, ears, mouth, eyes, brain, etc.

Loving kindness meditation has Buddhist origins. It is often seen as a connective practice using meditation, prayer, and chanting. Use a traditional Buddhist mantra below or adapt and create your own language to suit your preferences:

May I be peaceful.  
May I be happy.  
May I be well.  
May I be safe.  
May I be free from suffering.

May all beings be peaceful.  
May all beings be happy.  
May all beings be well.  
May all beings be safe.  
May all beings be free from suffering.

Repeat the words slowly, pausing between phrases for contemplation, focusing on the intention of the words. Practitioners report that self-compassion meditation creates feelings of peacefulness and harmony, builds resiliency against depression and anxiety, and increases life satisfaction, optimism, social connectedness, and happiness.

Focusing on whom and/or what you are grateful for, as well as what brings you joy and happiness, positively affects brain activity, mood, and your ability to show compassion to others.

In addition, studies have shown the simple act of smiling repetitively helps with one's mood and strengthens the brain's neural ability to maintain a positive outlook on life. Some faith traditions encourage smiling meditation. Continued research is being done on the positive effects of smiling meditation and compassion. Some organizations offer compassionate mind training (CMT).

- **Chanting and Mantra Meditation** – thinking, audibly speaking, and/or slowly breathing out certain word(s) or phrases, often repeatedly, has shown to help persons relax and reduce stress. The word or phrases often have a smooth, easy, and relaxing sound like “om”, “so hum”, “peace”. Some people use liturgies, doxologies, and canticles from their faith tradition such as The Rosary, Kyrie Eleison (“Lord have mercy”) or Metta (“may all beings be well”). Others use mantras, sometimes silently, combined with deep breathing such as inhaling the word “let” and exhaling the word “go” or breathing in “peace” and breathing out “worries”. Practitioners report that mantras help one focus mentally, reinforce sources of meaning, build discipline, and reduce anxiety. The vibrations produced have been studied to have positive calming effects on the body.
- **Aromatherapy** – Pleasant fragrances may be relaxing for some people. Some people burn oils (e.g. eucalyptus, sage, cedar, chamomile), or use them in baths. Others use relaxing fragrances as part of their bed-time ritual along with other mental activities to help them ease into sleep. Some cultures also burn certain herbs or smudge sticks for ritualistic and ceremonial purposes (e.g. smudging). Some studies have proposed that burning certain herbs results in higher alertness and mental energy. Combined with other activities, aromatherapy can help cultivate a relaxing atmosphere and promote a pleasant mood.
- **Fasting** – withholding food or certain types of food for a certain time period while also increasing our attention on our spiritual life has been practiced in many cultures. Sometimes people fast from meats and focus on plant based diets in order to rid the body of certain impurities and bacteria in their systems. Fasting does not have to be about food; sometimes people fast from television or fast from other items that are distracting them from cultivating their spiritual life. Those with dietary health issues should always consult medical advice before fasting from food.
- **Lectio Divina/Reading** – Deep, contemplative reading is part of all faith traditions with written scriptures. There are many ways of practicing *Lectio Divina* (“divine reading”); some describe four levels of meaning and four approaches to meditating on the text: *lectio* (reading and then understanding the text), *meditatio* (reflection and contextualizing the meaning), *oratio* (listening within and living the meaning), and *contemplatio* (being still, and meeting God or a Higher Power in the text). Some also use poetry and quotes for meditative reading.
- **Beholding** – is an inward practice encouraging people to enter into the various ways they see what is around them. Some people find it easier to relax their thoughts and mind by focusing on a specific object, perhaps meditating on a candle flame, to help them slowly relax their thoughts and focus their attention.

- **Medical Hypnosis or Hypnotherapy** – refers to a trance-like state in which persons have heightened focus and concentration for the purpose of increasing self-awareness and control over psychological responses and bodily functions. Hypnosis is usually done with the help of a certified therapist using verbal repetition, mental images, or other techniques. When one is in a deeply focused state they tend to become unusually responsive to an idea or image but this does not mean that a hypnotist can control the person's mind. In medical hypnosis the opposite is true as hypnosis can actually teach people how to master their own states of awareness. Some report multiple benefits including stress and anxiety reduction, increased pain management, some relief from irritable bowel symptoms, fear reduction, and relief from phobias.
- **Mental Games/Exercises** – keeping the mind active and intellectually stimulated through board games, computer word games, crossword puzzles, card games, or other visually stimulating exercises may be stress reducing, mentally stimulating, and enjoyable for some people. Some people who experience issues with movement, particularly in the coordination of their hands and fingers, find it helpful to use a flat computer tablet for texting or games. Although, puzzles and games may not prevent dementia or cognitive decline, they can provide a higher cognitive point from which to decline. Regularly challenging oneself can build some resilience and improve coping.

### **Creative Practices**

- **Therapeutic Journaling, Letter Writing, Gratitude Journal** – may be a healthy and creative way to capture the movement of one's inner experiences. It's not necessarily a diary meant to capture events of one's life; rather, journaling taps into the reflections of the mental and emotional occurrences within us. "Journals take for granted that every day in our life there is something new and different," wrote Thomas Merton in his journal. The more mindful we become as writers, often the more we are able to capture the meanings of our experiences.
  - Some use focused writing techniques such as "therapeutic letter writing" which involves capturing in imaginative written form one's positive visualizations of future events and goal-setting.
  - Others may focus on capturing daily things they are grateful for to reinforce sources of meaning such as keeping a "gratitude journal" asking from both first person and second person point of views to open new perspectives.
    - What am I grateful for?
    - What are "you" grateful for?
    - What are you doing for yourself?
    - What gives you joy or meaning in life?
    - What gives you pleasure?
  - Others may focus on existential issues using prompt questions such as:
    - What is this disease teaching you?
    - God, where are you in my life right now?
    - God, how are you moving in my life right now?
    - What has your life taught others or what is your life teaching others?
  - Internet search "journal prompts" or "therapeutic journal prompts" for more ideas. Again, consider asking these questions of yourself from a 2<sup>nd</sup> person point of view.

- How are you healthy? In the midst of everything happening to me, what's going right?
- Your favorite way to spend the day is...
- Make a list of 30 things that make you smile.
- The words you'd like to live by are...
- You really wish others knew this about you...
- Choose a personal photo, "What do you feel when you look at these photos?" "What do you want to say to the people, places, or things in these photos?"
- With all that is happening, what are you learning about yourself, or your relationships?
- Who are you becoming in this diagnosis? Who do you want to become....what do you want to be known for....what legacy would you like to leave with others?

An intuitive writing experience is listed below, taken from *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*, website [www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org):

"Choose a quiet space where you will not be disturbed. Do a simple breathing meditation to clear and focus your mind and cultivate awareness.

- Optional: Write a question. Write a few lines on anything you would like intuitive guidance on. Focusing on one question ensures optimal clarity. For example:
  - How can I become more effective in my job? (work)
  - Why do I have such difficulty developing healthy eating habits? (health)
  - How can I have a stronger relationship with my family? (relationships)
- Start to write. Write whatever comes. Don't think, and don't judge what you are writing. Write whatever comes out of the pen. If you get stuck, start writing, "I feel stuck." Keep your pen moving! Keep writing, and don't think about where it is coming from. Write for 5, 10 or 15 minutes. You'll know when you're done.

When done, read through you have written out loud, and see how it makes you feel. Try to distinguish if you are writing from your intuition or your rational mind. Keep Practicing!"

With easy accessible, less expensive, and easy to use technology, some people use video and/or audio journaling to record short reflections, thoughts, and wishes for themselves or others. With video and audio journaling, using the senses of sight and hearing may add to the experience.

- **Music/Sound Therapy, Deep Listening, and Singing** – uses music or sounds that are particularly helpful to a person to promote stress reduction. This is often used in conjunction with the use of guided imagery or meditation. Much like mantra meditation, studies show that certain sounds have positive effects on one's emotional and physical life. Sometimes it involves playing a musical instrument, listening and relaxing to music of your choice, and/or focusing on the nuances of the sounds. Some faith-based and non-faith based communities intentionally gather around music and meditation such as Taize.

The power of singing and playing a musical instrument has been shown in many cultures to promote wellbeing. Whether singing as an individual or in a group, not only does this

practice help people exercise their range of verbal and speech abilities, it helps to encourage an expression of feelings.

Other options include seeking a trained music therapist who can help provide music-based interventions to meet patient and/or family members' goals and needs. Interventions may include music improvisation, lyric discussion, legacy building, songwriting, and music facilitated relaxation. Music therapy may help patient's manage or distract them from pain, provide emotional support, self-expression, improve coping skills, and overall mood.

Music therapy can include creating, singing, moving to or listening to music in order to:

- Release negative emotion
- Express feelings that would otherwise go unsaid
- Reduce stress and relax the mind and body
- Allow for a sense of normalcy during uncertain times
- Help people live in the "here and now"
- Participate in a group class where you can either listen to music or play along
- Participate in a "gong bath"
- Talk with a therapist about the feelings certain music evokes in you

One may find that the practice of active listening also improves one's abilities to listen to others and be fully present with them, without trying to control or judge the moment.

Below is brief instruction for meditating on sound taken from *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*, website [www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org):

Try to sit stable and still, like a mountain. Be relaxed and alert. Close your eyes.

Listen to the sounds as they occur.

Do not imagine, name, or analyze the sounds.

As names arise, release them and return to the sounds.

Just listen with wide-open awareness.

Let the sounds come to you and touch your eardrums.

As thoughts, emotions, memories, associations arise in your mind, notice them, gently let them go, and return to the sounds.

Notice how the sounds arise and fall away.

Do not grasp at sounds. Do not reject sounds.

If there are no sounds, listen, and rest in the silence.

After the exercise, ask:

In your daily life notice the positive and negative habits you might have in your approach to listening.

What helps you to listen fully, without judgment?

- **Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT)** – It is a standardized system of clinical techniques that use the functional perception of all properties of music to train and retrain brain and behavior function. The sessions are administered by certified music therapists who have been specifically trained to use NMT techniques. The symptoms being targeted vary on a patient basis.
- **Contemplative Arts/ Art Therapy** – Making art and working with art forms such as sculpture, clay, painting, sketching, weaving, collaging, and sewing may be considered therapeutic in some ways as people engage in the process with intentional

contemplative awareness. Both the process of making artwork and the product itself may serve as sources of inspiration, meditation, expression, and healing. For those who feel they lack artistic skill and are not interested in the end product, value may be found in simply engaging and observing one's inner thoughts in the process of making the art. Yet, some may wish to focus on producing a piece of art, which may be directly related to other contemplative practices. For instance, finger painting, painting a religious icon, weaving a prayer shawl, stringing a rosary, or hand-binding a journal may be done with mindful intention. Working with clay or even playdo may help with strengthening one's hands, imagination, and creativity.

Some seek out art therapists who are specially educated and trained to use art forms alongside counseling techniques to improve quality of life, including helping patients and families increase self-awareness, cope with symptoms, and adapt to stressful experiences. Many art therapists have educational backgrounds in human development, psychological and behavioral disorders, counseling theories, and therapeutic techniques. Art therapy embraces a variety of art forms, such as sculpture, painting, drawing, and ceramics. No art experience is necessary and all materials are usually provided.

### **Service Activities**

- **Volunteer** – Getting active in your community in service oriented ways is often an excellent way to restore personal joy, connection to others, make friends, and reinforce meaning in one's life. Many believe that one of our main human purposes is serving and caring for other people. Irvin Yalom, professor of psychiatry at Stanford University Medical School writes, "The belief that it is good to give, to be useful to others, to make the world better for others, is a powerful source of meaning" (Existential Psychotherapy, p.434). Serving others in ways such as volunteering in a homeless shelter, food bank, hospital, center for pets, or a lay visitor in your faith community are just a few ways one may serve.
- **Simplicity** – When we think of the practice of simplicity, it is a quality of mind, a way of being in the world, a way of letting go of the desire for more and accepting what you have at the moment, even letting go what you really don't need. Some people practice simplicity by giving away things they have collected and amassed through the years. They are simplifying their lives, making their lives in a way easier to manage, becoming lighter and less burdened with "stuff". Others practice simplicity by letting go of their need to control certain circumstances, taking a spiritual cue from nature itself.
- **Pilgrimage, vigils, marches** – Many faith traditions encourage individuals to journey and search for moral and spiritual significance. Person's may pilgrimage or hike to a shrine or location of importance and meaning. Another way to understand pilgrimages is to see them as a metaphorical journey into one's own beliefs. Engaging in social justice marches, joining community walks and fundraising events are yet other ways of exercising one's values in action often enriching person's with the experience of participating in something meaningful for themselves and others.

### **Relational Practices**

- **Counseling and Therapy** – dialoguing with others is an important relational practice. Opening ourselves, being real with our fears, vulnerabilities, faults, grief, and hopes with

another trusted person can be a powerful experience. Satisfying the human need to be heard often provides reinforcement of one's life meanings and stress reduction, even when there may be no solutions to the issues. Many times, close family members and friends serve as persons with whom we can talk to about our feelings and experiences, they can help strengthen value and meaning and support in ways individuals live and respond to the impact of the disease. Some have found that talking with a professional counselor can be particularly helpful. Counselors may offer specific techniques and therapeutic approaches that may help with pain and stress reduction.

- **Compassionate Communication** – suggests that empathic and intentional conversation around meaningful issues or topics reduce stress, and promote wellbeing. Lead with opened ended-questions, “I’m curious.... I’m wondering...” If you find yourself talking about stressors and relational concerns, develop constructive ways to talk about feelings “When you do this.... I feel this... what I’d like to suggest instead is...” Compassionate communication is a state of mind, accepting ourselves in our flaws and weaknesses. It strengthens making it easier for us to accept the faults we find in others. For instance, even in the simplest way, coming home and announcing with a smile, “It is good to be home” helps promote your wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of those around you. Engaging in compassionate communication with another person(s) can be rewarding and relaxing.
- **Support Groups** – are an important source of connecting with others, sharing common human experiences and emotions, and finding solidarity in your own journey with others who may be experiencing the same issues. Many have reported making meaningful friendships in their support group.
- **Faith Groups** - Being involved with a healthy and well balanced faith community, if that is of interest to you, can be very helpful. Some faith groups offer home and community visitation through lay visitation programs or specific pastoral support. They may bring communion or other religious sacraments or rituals to your place of residence.
- **Storytelling/ Life review** – Stories shared from personal experience can draw out connectedness and meaning in life as well as the wisdom of those gathered to listen. The themes of these stories can be explored, allowing this collective knowledge to be used in practical ways. Taking time to share your own stories or have others reflect on another's life accomplishments, achievements, challenges, and victories bring forth gratitude and meaning that may prompt powerful personal experiences. Some groups use methods from council circles modeled after Native American traditions. Some capture their life story with legacy journals, videos, ethical wills, or other means. Some seek out personal biographers specializing in helping individuals write life reviews.
- **Pet Therapy** – Pet therapy may include animal-assisted therapy and other animal-assisted activities. The benefits of pet therapy are indisputable and a fair amount of supporting research is growing that demonstrates that positive human-animal interventions may help improve one's physical, emotional, and psychological life. For instance, interactions with animals have shown to decrease the perception of pain, promote healthcare compliance, reduce stress, minimize anxiety, reduce feelings of isolation, and lower blood pressure. Some research attributed part of these benefits to the bonding hormone oxytocin that is released when petting a dog. That same surge of oxytocin also lowers blood pressure, wards off depression and boosts immunity.

Animal-assisted activities have a broad purpose, such as assisting people with specific tasks, providing comfort, enjoyment, and companionship. One may also choose to volunteer as part of a therapy animal team or at a local veterinarian hospital or animal shelter.

Animal-assisted therapy is a growing field that uses dogs, horses, or other animals to help people recover from or better cope with physical and emotional health. Animal-assisted therapy is when a therapy animal team is overseen by a professional health provider and incorporated as part of a structured therapeutic intervention. For example, working with a physical therapist where the client practices brushing a dog for strength building exercises or partnering with an occupational therapist where the task of attaching a secondary leash to an animal is an activity to work on fine motor skills. Some therapists and counselors use horses to help individuals and families work through painful memories, trauma, and emotions (also see hippotherapy).

### **Body Kinetic Practices/Activities**

- **Exercise and Aquatic Therapy** – Exercising is one of the best things we can do for our bodies. Evidence suggests that regular exercise slows down the impact of some movement disorders such as Parkinson's, and it clearly improves strength, mobility, and vitality. Some benefits of exercise may include:
  - Improving digestion
  - Improving energy and the ability to perform some daily activities
  - Improving flexibility and reach
  - Improving balance and posture (reducing falls)
  - Improving muscle strength and walking speed
  - Improving sleep
  - Improving mood

A basic exercise routine includes a cardiovascular workout at least 3 days a week, stretching every day, and strengthening at least 2 days a week. Brisk walking is an excellent routine for many, with the addition of shoulder range of motion exercises each morning. Seeing a physical therapist can be helpful to develop a program that is most beneficial and takes into consideration your individual medical conditions, lifestyle, and preferences. Some find working with a personal trainer beneficial for external motivation. Find what fits for you, start slow, and build up your routine to develop a habit. It must be a regimen that will be done regularly for it to be beneficial. Make the time and enlist a significant other or friend to join you. Exercising is as important as everything else you do each day.

In addition, an active lifestyle is also vital for mood, so pick activities that are fun, safe and challenging. Some have found performing slow body movements in a pool of water has been helpful for reducing stress, and an easy way to strengthen muscles and improve movement. Moving your arms from side to side, performing lateral raises, fly motions, side leg lifts, and forward knee raises are just a sampling of simple exercises one can perform in the pool. Swimming is also excellent, especially for those with arthritis.

- **Stretching and Movement Therapies** – Stretching, and other movement based exercises have been practiced all over the world and have promoted increased energy, flexibility, and stress reduction. Yoga therapy and awareness-based movement practices like *Feldenkrais* uses postures, breathing techniques, meditation, and guided relaxation to address specific health concerns including physical discomfort, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, digestive disorders, and stress. These practices may also provide a way to achieve greater quality of life for those experiencing movement issues.
- **Tai Chi and Qigong** – are movement based relaxation exercises that are becoming more popular in outdoor parks, recreation centers, clinics, hospitals, and senior centers. Though both Tai Chi and Qigong have roots in Eastern Asian martial arts, they offer different emphases. Both offer a holistic approach (mind, body, spirit) to coordinating body posture and movement, breathing, and meditation for improving one’s physical and emotional life. Qigong is commonly understood as a practice to cultivate balance Qi (chi) or “life energy”. Tai chi and Qigong usually involve coordinating slow flowing movement, deep rhythmic breathing, and a calm meditative state of mind; they may improve balance and posture. One may purchase audio or video files or access free Internet videos (e.g. YouTube) on Tai Chi, yoga, and guided imagery to help with the practice; try connecting the video to your Internet enabled T.V. (if practical and possible).
- **Acupuncture** – Acupuncture works by using needles at certain acupoints in the body to access the Qi or vital energy as well as release blood flow to those centers. Licensed practitioners may supplement, drain, or move the Qi in order to restore the proper flow of energy through the meridians in the body. Meridians are similar to highways of energy in the body. Practitioners report numerous health benefits from this practice including stress reduction, better pain management, and reduced insomnia.
- **Deep Yawning Meditation** – Studies have shown connections between yawning and our brain activity in areas such as alertness, concentration, lowering stress, and even increasing empathy, social awareness, and pleasure. Even when you don’t feel like yawning, fake yawning 6 or 7 times as wide as is comfortable. Try it for longer periods of time and notice that even with 1 minute of deep yawning, you may feel just slightly more alert and present in the moment.
- **Laughter Therapy** – also called humor therapy or sometimes referred to as laughter yoga, is a practice that focuses on the natural physiological process of laughter to help relieve physical stresses and promote emotional well-being. Many health care providers have acknowledged that laughter therapy can help improve quality of life for patients with chronic illnesses. Some hospitals and cancer centers now offer laughter therapy programs as a complementary treatment to illness.

After evaluating participants before and after a humorous event (i.e., a comedy video, combining yoga/breathing and laughter, intentionally inducing laughter), studies have demonstrated that episodes of laughter helped to:

- Reduce and help distract patients from pain, sometimes triggering the release of endorphins (the body’s natural painkillers)
- Decrease stress-related hormones; boost the immune and circulatory systems enhancing oxygen intake, stimulating the heart and lungs
- Relax muscles throughout the body reducing stress and tension; ease digestion and reduce stomach aches

- Improve overall attitude and mental function (e.g. alertness, creativity)
- Strengthen social bonds and relationships

Some find it helpful to join humor therapy sessions, also known as laughter clubs or humor groups. These leader-led groups take patients through a number of laugh-related exercises including fake laughter and laughter greetings. For example, patients stand in a circle and put their fingertips on their cheekbones, chest or lower abdomen and make “ha ha” or “hee hee” sounds until they feel vibrations through their bodies.

Laughter can help you feel better about yourself and the world around you. Some people experience a liberating feeling to laugh especially in the midst of facing a chronic debilitating illness.

- **Dance** – Some persons, particularly experiencing challenges to their mobility, have used dance as an activity to restore better movement, flexibility, posture, and coordination - while at the same time connect with their loved one(s) and others - for enjoyable social moments. There are many types of dancing yet Ballroom dancing schools have become very popular because they offer a variety of easier dancing techniques.
- **Walking Meditation** – Walking meditation is another contemplative practice where individuals intentionally draw attention to the movement of their muscles, the placement of their feet, balance issues, posture, and motion. Walking meditation has a long tradition in Buddhism yet is a practice that offers universal value for all people, especially those who are concerned about balance. You can practice meditative walking by finding a comfortable space in your home and walking back and forth about 10 to 20 steps in length. Further instruction on walking meditation can be found at *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*, link <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/walking-meditation>
- **Therapeutic Massage** – Therapeutic massage may provide wonderful physical and emotional relief. Varying styles and therapies include Swedish, deep tissue, therapeutic or injury recovery massages. Some centers offer Thai yoga, Ashiatsu oriental bar therapy, and also relaxing spa treatments such as hot herbal steam treatment, and hot stone massage. Neuromuscular therapy is a specialized form of deep tissue massage that utilizes digital pressure and friction to release areas of muscle strain, called tender or trigger points, which may be the source of muscular pain symptoms.
- **Reiki/Healing Touch** – Some people have found the ancient Eastern practice of Reiki to be a helpful practice to decrease pain, reduce stress, boost the immune system, improve sleep, and promote positive emotions. Reiki means universal life energy. Reiki practitioners place or hover their hands on specific areas of the body to enable more effective energy flow. Some forms of reiki also involve “laying on of hands”. Reiki is non-invasive and works in harmony with all other medical practices and treatments.
- **Equine/Hippotherapy** – “...refers to the incorporation of equine (horse) movement by physical therapy, occupational therapy, or speech language pathology professionals in treatment” American Hippotherapy Association (AHA). According to the AHA, therapists “use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement to engage the sensorimotor and neuromotor systems to create

functional change in their patients. Used with other neuromotor and sensorimotor techniques, hippotherapy is part of a patient's integrated plan of care." It can improve posture and provide stress reduction.

- **Float Pods/Cabins** – offer an experience in which one floats weightlessly on his or her back in a dense saline solution at body temperature. Some have reported that floating in a zero-gravity environment helps reduce pressure on the back and muscles. Some also find that depriving the senses is an energizing, rejuvenating practice that improves health and well-being, alleviates stress, and facilitates meditation and self-improvement. Other terms related to floating are isolation tanks, chamber REST, relaxation therapy, and relaxation training.

Some people use float pods for the following reasons, among others: anger management, anxiety attacks, cardiac health, depression, general well-being, headache, high blood pressure, preparation for hypnosis, immune system support, insomnia, pain management, stress management, addiction treatment, and nightmare disorder.

- **Virtual Reality** – Virtual reality has been used in rehab settings to improve walking and mobility with those impacted by movement disorders. Using virtual reality eye goggles, persons take guided steps with the assurance of others supporting them. For those struggling with movement and others looking for new sources of joy, virtual reality also offers ways of engaging outdoor nature settings, theme parks, museums, and flying through the air from the comfort of your home. Some persons have reported increased joy and well-being from using this technology.

### **Rituals/Ceremonial Practices**

- **Establish a sacred/personal space** – some persons have emphasized the benefit of having a dedicated personal space in their home or somewhere outdoors where they can relax, engage their thoughts, and reflect on issues. Some cultures have also emphasized bringing the energy, harmony, and serenity from the outdoors into their indoor space (Feng Shui). Some people set up home altars, or surround their spaces with meaningful items. For example, some furnish rooms with one or two easy chairs, floral pictures, earth-themed objects, religious items, design lighting that is soft, and use comforting piano or flute music. Others have spoken of seeking empty spaces where there is no sound and no light, and sitting quietly and meditatively. Creating an atmosphere or a sanctuary where one can go routinely to reduce stress and renew emotional and spiritual energies has been shown to be a helpful ritualistic practice.
- **Retreats** – have often been utilized as a great way to get away from usual distractions and to engage in and deepen one's contemplative practices and inner life. One may choose solitary or group retreats, religiously oriented, structured or un-structured, or even silent retreats in one's home, retreat centers, or in the outdoors. Structured retreats are organized by teachers and often provide education and guidance.
- **Religious or cultural ceremonies and rituals** – may be important ways of connecting with meaning in life. Attending a worship or ceremonial service, if that is of interest to you, has been shown to help people engage deeper connection with what transcends them and greater relational connection with others.