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# The MS Messenger

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## Alternative therapy in Multiple Sclerosis

By: Mirla Avila, MD  
Post Doctoral MS Fellow

**Alternative therapy** is any medical treatment or intervention that has not been scientifically documented as safe or effective for a specific condition. **Complementary therapies** are alternative therapies used in addition to traditional treatments. Together these are generally referred to as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) treatments.

CAM treatment can be helpful in many cases, but sometimes it can be ineffective, costly, and even dangerous. The best way to evaluate your options is to become educated. There are many CAM therapies described for multiple sclerosis (MS). We will briefly review the most common ones.

**Acupuncture.** There are few scientific studies that confirm the benefit of this discipline in MS. Some people have reported some relief of pain, muscle spasms and bladder control. It is important to keep in mind that acupuncture should be always performed by a licensed practitioner and with sterile techniques.

**Evening primrose oil (linoleic acid).** This is found in sunflower seeds and safflower oil. It has been reported that oral supplement of linoleic acid may slightly improve MS symptoms.

**Marijuana.** Some people with MS claim that smoking marijuana helps relieve spasticity and other MS-related symptoms, but the use of marijuana to treat any illness remains highly controversial. There is little evidence to date that marijuana really works and it is well known that this drug is associated with serious long-term side effects such as memory loss, heart attack and stroke.

**Antioxidants.** It appears that treatment with antioxidants can be helpful. These include vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene, and selenium. Given the possible stimulating effects of antioxidants on the immune system and the lack of studies of antioxidant safety in MS it is recommended to obtain these elements through foods like fruit and vegetables instead of taking them by oral supplements. If people with MS

chose to use antioxidant vitamin supplements these should be in low doses. (Vit A 5,000 IU or less, Vit C 90 to 120 milligrams or less and Vit E 100 IU or less). High doses should be avoided.

**Turmeric.** (*Curcuma longa*) is a plant native to south India and Indonesia. It is used as a condiment (curry powder), as a textile dye, and for medical purposes. Curcuminoids are the major substances that give the spice turmeric its yellow color. It is a powerful antioxidant and can have an anti-inflammatory effect.

**Vitamin D.** There have been several studies about the role of vitamin D in MS. Higher levels of vitamin D have been associated with a lower risk for later developing MS. Other studies suggests that vitamin D may have important effects on the immune system and may help regulate cell growth and differentiation. The recommended intake of vitamin D is 200 to 600 IU a day.

**L-carnitine.** Is a substance found in most cells of the body, particularly the brain, neural tissue, muscle, and

## Alternative Medicine: continued from Page 1

neural tissue, muscle, and heart. It can be taken as a pill and may provide physical energy. In the form of acetyl L carnitine, it can help to enhance mental clarity and focus.

**Ginkgo biloba.** This extract is used more in peripheral vascular disease and the therapy of age related cognitive decline. Ginkgo biloba extract is believed to be a mind booster.

**Diet.** Some people recommend reducing the amount of saturated fat, limiting all dairy foods, including whole milk, eggs, cheese, and meats high in fat such as red meats. Also to increase intake of polyunsaturated oil including vegetable oils, safflower oils, sunflower seeds; pumpkin seeds, wheat germ, and wheat germ oil. There is no evidence that these changes will improve MS symptoms. A well balanced diet is always recommended.

**Removal of amalgam fillings.** There is no scientific evidence to connect the development or worsening of MS with dental

fillings containing mercury, and therefore no reason to have those fillings removed. Although poisoning with heavy metals-such as mercury, lead, or manganese-can damage the nervous system and produce symptoms such as tremor and weakness, the damage is inflicted in a different way than occurs in MS and the process is also different.

**Bee sting therapy.** In spite of long-standing claims about the possible benefits of bee venom for people with MS, a 24-week randomized study showed no reduction in disease activity, disability, or fatigue, and no improvement in quality of life.

**Low Dose Naltrexone.** Naltrexone is an oral semi synthetic opiate antagonist licensed for the treatment of heroin addiction. In the past few years, there have been anecdotal reports that low doses of this medication prevent relapses and reduce the disease progression in MS. There is no scientific evidence to document these effects, but in the

latest meeting of the American Academy of Neurology there were two small studies which reported a symptomatic effect on spasticity, pain and fatigue in patients with primary progressive MS and improvement of the quality of life in MS patients using low dose naltrexone.

If you or some one you know is planning on using CAM therapy for MS, there is something important to keep in mind. The treatments your physician prescribes for you are the ones that have been evaluated in controlled clinical trials and accepted by the MS medical community as safe and effective therapies. So stay with your prescribed treatments even if you decide to add complementary therapy to your treatment plan.

***\*It is important to make sure your doctor knows what therapy you are considering so he or she can discuss possible interactions or side effects with your current treatment.***

### Join an MS WALK Team here at the Clinic-Call Toni

*Thinking of walking in one of the MS Walks? Toni, Don't have time to walk? You can also make a one of our clinic nurses is participating in the Katy walk on September 27th. This walk may be appealing to you all as it takes place in Katy Mills Mall, yes that means it is air-conditioned!*

*You can become a part of her walk team by visiting [www.walkmstexas.org](http://www.walkmstexas.org) or calling Toni at 713-798-5663.*

*Are you a patient? We have forms to complete if you are willing to be someone that can educate other walkers about MS and your experience. See Nedra at the front desk to complete the form.*

# Summer Heat and High Electric Bills bringing you down? Here are some relief resources.



Does this summer feel HOT to you? Me too! This heat outside causes us to

keep our thermostats low which creates a bigger problem, HIGH ELECTRICITY BILLS!

If you are needing assistance paying your electricity bill there is help! And, it is best to get

help **before** you are in crisis. There are regulations that protect the elderly and persons with disabilities from getting their electricity cut off without proper cause and also programs for payment plans. Here are some resources for relief!

1. For help with paying your current bill or to find out about monthly assistance programs, call "211" United Way Helpline.

2. If you feel you are not being treated fairly by your electric company provider, call Advocacy Inc at 1-800-880-082, this is the number for the Houston office.

3. You can also get financial assistance from the National MS Society by calling 713-526-8967 press 2 and ask for Client Programs and Services representative, Alicia.

## Meet The Staff: Toni Saldana-King, RN, BSN, MSCN



Toni Saldana-King joined the clinic primarily working with Dr. Hutton's patients in January 2008.

She is a native Houstonian and graduated Dean's list

from Texas Women's University.

She brings with her eleven years experience as a Cardiovascular Intensive Care nurse and also spent some time in genetics involving aneurysms and dissections. Her most recent experience was with the University of Texas Medical Center MS Clinic from which some of you may recognize her.

In May of this year, Toni took and successfully passed the national exam to become an MS Certified Nurse. This is a prestigious recognition and we are all so proud of her

here at the clinic.

Outside of the clinic, Toni is actively involved with the MS Society on committees and will participate as a volunteer for the MS Walk in September. She has also attended several nursing conferences and teleconferences since joining the clinic. She is married with three beautiful children, Tyler 10, Kenzie 8, and Joseph 1, and one "big fat cat," states her children. Her hobbies are gardening, spending time with the family, dancing, sailing, and reading (when all the kids are asleep).

# BCM

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*"Making life livable for persons with MS."*

## National MS Society Corner

### It's WALK TIME!

Walk MS 2008 Fall Series

#### September 20

Walk MS Kemah

Kemah Boardwalk - 1  
mile and 5K routes

#### September 27

Walk MS Katy

Katy Mills Mall - 1 mile  
loop in the mall

Walk MS The Woodlands

Panther Creek - 5 mile  
route

Run MS The Woodlands  
Panther Creek - 5 mile  
route

Corporate Challenge and  
Awards

#### September 28

Walk MS Downtown  
Houston

Sam Houston Park - 1  
mile and 5K  
routes

There is no registration  
fee nor is there a mini-  
mum donation. The first  
prize level starts at \$100 in  
donations which is the of-  
ficial T-shirt. We hope  
that everyone that partici-  
pates "walks" away with  
the

T! [www.walkmstexas.org](http://www.walkmstexas.org)

7am registration, walk  
starts at 8am!