

Welcome to the first edition of *Being Well: The PWA/ACT Wellness Bulletin for PHAs*, a joint project of the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (PWA) and the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT). The purpose of *Being Well* is to provide people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) with relevant and up-to-date HIV-related health and wellness information and resources.

Our first edition, on complementary therapies, explores this topic from both personal and professional perspectives with a focus on yoga, reiki, and naturopathic medicine. We've also included a list of helpful resources if you're interested in learning more about complementary therapies or want to know how to access them.

“One way of thinking about complementary therapies is as a set of tools to help facilitate personal growth, self-discovery and healing.”

We know that many PHAs are interested in complementary therapies and that many of you are already using them to maintain your health and improve your well-being. PHAs, in fact, may use complementary therapies more than other groups — one recent study suggests that at least 50% of PHAs use complementary therapies in addition to conventional therapy.

One way of thinking about complementary therapies is as a set of tools to help facilitate personal growth, self-discovery and healing. PHAs report using complementary therapies for a vari-

ety of reasons: to maintain their health, to alleviate the side effects of drug therapies, to establish a sense of control over their health management, and to manage depression.

Complementary therapies include a wide range of therapies used by naturopathic doctors and other practitioners, such as acupuncture, massage, meditation, yoga, homeopathy, herbal nutrition and self-help groups. They are also sometimes referred to as 'mind-body therapies' and can include psychotherapy, imagery therapy, expressive arts therapies and spirituality based therapies.

We know that nutrition is another important, but sometimes confusing, area of discussion for PHAs, so we decided to include a special section on nutrition in this edition of *Being Well*. Stephanie De Maio, a registered dietitian at the Positive Care Clinic at St. Michael's Hospital, has written an article on nutrition and HIV/AIDS and will be answering your questions in upcoming editions of *Being Well* in a regular feature called "Ask Stephanie." This section will provide you with the opportunity to have your nutrition-related questions answered by one of our local experts in the HIV/AIDS field. Stephanie will focus on current and popular nutrition-related topics of interest to PHAs.

We're planning upcoming features for *Being Well* on nutrition and smoking cessation as well as other wellness topics of interest to PHAs. Let us know if you have any ideas or suggestions for future issues — we'd love to hear from you!

Kristy Buck (Wellness Program Coordinator, ACT) & Meera Dhebar (Programs Coordinator, PWA)

**Contact us at:**

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[www.actoronto.org/beingwell](http://www.actoronto.org/beingwell)

[www.pwatoronto.org/healthpromo](http://www.pwatoronto.org/healthpromo)

# Yoga: An Introduction

Devan Nambiar, CATIE

Yoga, meaning union with the self, is a discipline developed over 5000 years ago in India. There is more to yoga than the postures (asanas), but the postures are usually the easiest part of the discipline to learn before incorporating the other components. The other components of yoga are: breath control (pranayama), meditation, mantras and diet (pure foods). Every yoga posture has an equal and opposite posture to remove any tension from the spine and involves focused breathing.

How can yoga be useful to PHAs? Yoga builds body strength, stretches the muscles, improves blood circulation, calms the mind, decreases stress, and eases fatigue. Yoga practice can bring you a state of calmness and inner peace and improve your quality of life.

It's important to find a yoga teacher who is knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and inform the teacher of any past surgeries or bone problems. Some postures are not recommended for a PHA if you have an opportunistic infection such as CMV or toxoplasmosis. Inverted postures are not generally recommended for people with upper body infections. It's recommended that you avoid caffeine and alcohol intake prior to a yoga class and give yourself at least an hour or two after a meal before practicing.

## Yoga for Health: A Personal Perspective

Tommy King

During a course I attended at PWA many years ago, a woman shared a philosophy with our group that has stayed with me throughout all of my journeys since. She said "the key to being a long term survivor is to always be as kind, loving and gentle with yourself as you can." In my search to find things that are fun, social, new and challenging, someone mentioned yoga. My first thought was "how could my tight legs, sore back and 40-plus body handle what yoga might have to offer?" I decided to try one class and see how I did.

A year later I am taking three classes a week and can't believe the physical, spiritual and emotional changes that have come as a result of my taking a chance.

I believe that living with HIV can give us the opportunity to face our fears about our mortality and then get on with living life to the fullest. We have the opportunity to create good, productive and full lives that include lots of self-care. Yoga can definitely contribute to that goal.

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The yoga classes at PWA are warm and enjoyable, thanks to the generosity and kindness of the two teachers who volunteer their time and knowledge. Both teachers are welcoming and attentive to new people and encourage students to work at their own pace. There is a good friendly group of core people who attend the yoga classes regularly and others who attend as their health and schedule allows.

I can now say that I no longer have a sore back, and my legs are much more flexible than they were a year ago. But much more importantly, I have taken the time to be as kind, loving and gentle with myself as I can be twice a week for an hour-and-a-half. Tuesday and Friday afternoons are the times I take for myself to do something important that has changed my life in many ways. If any of you have an interest in yoga please come and practice with us!

*PWA offers several yoga classes including: Mondays for beginners, Tuesdays and Fridays for intermediate level. All three classes are held at 4:30 p.m. To find out the location, please call PWA reception at 416-506-1400.*

# Reiki: An Introduction

Devan Nambiar, CATIE

Reiki (rei= universal, ki=energy or life force), a form of touch therapy, is a way of connecting with universal energy to improve one's health and quality of life. Touch therapies are founded on the notion that the blockage of life energy in an individual results in disease of the human body. Reiki is founded on the same belief and works to align the life force in the human body with the universal life force and restore a balance to the flow of energy within and around your body.

A reiki practitioner lays his/her hand on specific body locations, or energy fields, (there is no body contact and you are fully clothed) to guide or channel your energy and unblock your emotions. Many PHAs experience profound relaxation, increased energy, a release of emotions and an increased awareness of self during and after a reiki session.

## Reiki: A Personal Perspective

Gabriel Shpelt

Imagine a warm feeling that doesn't go away, a break from a chill as your muscles relax and your mind is cleared of all worries. Perhaps you will fall in a deep, uninterrupted sleep, or maybe you will be tempted to walk outside and see everything as if for the very first time. These are some of the benefits of a practice called Reiki.

Reiki and relaxation have gone hand-in-hand for thousands of years. Stemming from an ancient Japanese tradition, Reiki is a form of touch therapy by which a trained practitioner will lay his or her hands on your body and literally channel energy into your being.

Skeptical? So was I until I recently had a session with local Reiki healer, Eric Parker. Eric greeted me at PWA with a kind smile and a full understanding of my hesitation to believe that Reiki would have any effect on my tense body or even tense mind. I explained that I had been suffering from stiffness in my back, the result of a hard mattress and an inability to have a decent night sleep for several months. He claimed that he could help me.

He led me to a room with a massage table, and I laid down on my back. He began to work on the back of my head, softly placing his hands there and letting their warmth work their magic. Unaccustomed to his touch, I was nervous at first. He sensed this, but continued to move his hand over my face and onto my chest, which immediately responded to his touch. Suddenly my whole body gave in. The bone chilling shivers I had carried with me into the room disappeared as everything became warm and slightly numb. I fell into a deep sleep, waking 40 minutes later to his voice saying that we were finished. I felt like I had been asleep for a hundred years.

**“I felt like I had been asleep for a hundred years.”**

Lifting my body to a sitting position there was a new awareness of every joint, muscle and bone. Nothing hurt and the stiffness I had been complaining about for weeks was gone. My head was light, but I felt completely peaceful. For the first time in my memory, I was conscious of my breathing. Instinct told me that I didn't want to lose this feeling.

Later I asked Eric to describe how Reiki has directly affected those he has practiced on in the past. He told me that though Reiki cannot be considered a medical treatment, it has the power to relax someone completely, therefore enabling the immune system to function at its highest potential. He also gave me examples in which several people suffering chronic pain, side effects from HIV medications, and arthritis have all felt dramatically better after having Reiki performed on them. Eric's belief in the power of this treatment, combined with how I felt after the session, had me convinced. As of this writing, my next appointment is already booked.

*PWA offers reiki and therapeutic touch by trained practitioners. Call 416-506-8606 ext. 632 for more information or to book an appointment.*

# An Introduction to Naturopathic Medicine & HIV/AIDS

Zeynep Uraz, N.D.

Naturopathic doctors are seen as the generalists of the complementary medicine world and use a wide range of complementary therapies in their practice. Naturopathy is grounded in the idea of the healing power of nature and naturopathic doctors thus believe that the body has the innate ability to maintain a state of good health.

Naturopathic Medicine is based on a distinct type of medical philosophy that treats each person by following five naturopathic principles: The first principle is to do no harm. The other principles include maximizing the healing power of nature, identifying and treating the cause of an ailment, treating the whole person, and the doctor acting as a teacher.

“Naturopathic doctors use a variety of complementary therapies to help promote patients’ health.”

Naturopathic medicine uses a holistic approach to health management and can help someone living with HIV/AIDS by addressing many of the side effects of antiretroviral therapy and some of the common conditions associated with HIV/AIDS, such as indigestion, high blood pressure and low back pain. Naturopathic doctors working with PHAs often focus on the use of acupuncture for neuropathy, on food hygiene, on optimal nutrient intake, on immune-boosting botanicals and supplements and stabilizing digestion, but they can also help support PHAs in coping with emotional and psychological stresses related to living with HIV/AIDS.

Naturopathic doctors use a variety of complementary therapies to help promote patients’ health. This includes nutrition, botan-

ical medicine, homeopathy, acupuncture and hydrotherapy and body therapy. Nutrition is one of the cornerstones of good health and most naturopathic doctors will place special emphasis on a patient’s diet, introducing supplementation when appropriate. Botanical medicine – the use of herbs and supplements to promote health and prevent and treat illnesses – is sometimes used to boost the immune system and help the body deal with acute infections.

Homeopathy is a type of medicine that uses the philosophy of “like cures like” and is used to help people deal with the emotional, physical and mental aspects of health. Acupuncture can be used to help the body deal with various problems by stimulating the flow of Chi in specific organs or areas through the insertion of needles at designated points on the body. Hydrotherapy, or the use of water to revitalize, maintain and restore health, and bodywork, or massage, manipulation techniques and touch therapies, are tools to help stimulate circulation and promote relaxation.

The complementary therapies and tools naturopathic doctors will use to address your health concerns and help you to live well can usually be used in combination with standard medical therapies, but it’s a good idea to inform both your medical doctor and pharmacist as well as your naturopathic doctor about the entire range of strategies you’re using to maintain your health (including all medications and herbal remedies) in order to avoid any harmful interactions.

*The Community Naturopathic Clinic for people living with HIV/AIDS, a partnership between ACT, PWA, the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine and the Sherbourne Health Centre, offers free and confidential naturopathic services. To find out more or to make an appointment, call 416-324-4187.*



# Nutrition & HIV — Eat for Health!

Stephanie De Maio,  
RD, St. Michael's Hospital

With so many opinions on eating healthy, it's easy to get confused about what to eat. Sometimes it's best to get back to basics. We know that malnutrition and weight loss are serious concerns for people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) and cause death for many PHAs around the world. These concerns make it even more important for PHAs to focus on good nutrition and healthy eating.

But what is good nutrition? Nothing fancy! Eating fruit and vegetables, whole grains, dairy, or dairy alternatives (like soy) and protein based foods (like meat, chicken, fish or beans) every day. That's it! If our diets are adequate, meaning we are getting foods from these four food groups, we don't even need supplements of any kind. Some people may need to alter amounts of certain foods during particular times in life (such as during an active illness or during pregnancy), but all in all, this is the magic equation for good nutrition.

For more information on general nutrition and health, check out:

## [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

- Click on 'Eat Well, Live Well' on the left-hand side menu for helpful tips, fact sheets, frequently asked questions and interactive tools on eating healthy.
- Click on 'find a dietitian' to search for a dietitian who works in your area and specializes in HIV/AIDS – make sure to check 'HIV/AIDS/Immune Disorders' in the 'Health' section.

## [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

- Click on 'Food & Nutrition' on the left-hand menu, and then the 'Canada's Food Guide' box on the right to learn more about eating a balanced and healthy diet.

Ask  
Stephanie!

Upcoming issues of *Being Well* will include a Question & Answer section where Stephanie will answer some of your questions about nutrition and HIV.

Submit your questions to [nutrition@actoronto.org](mailto:nutrition@actoronto.org) or write them down and slip them into one of the question boxes at the front desk of ACT. (Please note that you will not receive a direct response to your question, but we will publish some of the most common questions and answers in an upcoming issue.)

Healthy Eating to Manage Cholesterol  
With Stephanie De Maio, Clinical Dietitian at  
St. Michael's Hospital, Positive Care Clinic

Thursday, August 30th, 2007  
1:30 — 3 p.m.

85 Bleecker St., Community Room  
Wheelchair accessible.

All PHAs are welcome.  
No registration is required.

For more information  
please call 416-340-8484 ext. 234

# Interested in Learning More About Complementary Therapies?

Erica Lee & Lily Mac, ACT Librarians

Check out these resources available in the ACT Library and online. You can use them to find out about different types of complementary therapies and how they can be used safely. Please remember, though, that any treatment decisions should be made in consultation with your health care provider. For more information about the ACT Library, visit us online at [www.actoronto.org/library](http://www.actoronto.org/library).

## **BC Health Guide Online: should I use complementary medicine?**

[www.bchealthguide.org/kbase/dp/topic/tx1097/dp.htm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/kbase/dp/topic/tx1097/dp.htm)

An article that discusses what to consider if you are thinking of using complementary therapies. An overview of complementary therapies and selected therapies is also available on the same website.

## **Complementary approaches to healthcare: diverse perspectives among people living with HIV/AIDS.** 2001. *AIDS and Public Policy Journal*. Vol. 16, no. 1/2. p. 18-27.

A research article that looks at how sexual identity, ethnocultural background, gender, and addiction can influence individuals with HIV/AIDS to use complementary therapies.

## **HIV/AIDS complementary therapists**

This resource lists complementary therapists in Toronto who welcome HIV-positive people as patients. The list also includes a section called "A Practical Guide to Complementary Medicines for Persons Living with HIV," which describes the different types of complementary therapies and tips on how to choose a complementary therapist. Available in print at the ACT Access Centre, and online at [www.actoronto.org/referral-lists](http://www.actoronto.org/referral-lists) (click on HIV/AIDS Complementary Therapists.pdf).

## **A healing touch: massage therapy and HIV/AIDS**

Delaney M. Toups Jr. 1999. *Step perspective*. Fall. [http://www.thebody.com/step/fall99/healing\\_touch.html](http://www.thebody.com/step/fall99/healing_touch.html)  
An article on the research supporting the benefits of massage therapy, including guidelines for people living with HIV/AIDS.

## **Marijuana cooking: good medicine made easy**

Bliss Cameron and Veronica Greene, 2005  
CIR 615.7 MAR CAM 2005

A simple, illustrated cookbook for those interested in using medical marijuana.

## **Meditation techniques**

Ron Kolb and Mark Shepherd. 2005. *Survival News*. May/June, p. 11.  
[www.thebody.com/asp/mayjun05/meditation.html?m99h](http://www.thebody.com/asp/mayjun05/meditation.html?m99h)

An article describing the purpose of meditation and the potential benefits for people living with HIV/AIDS. It also outlines basic meditation techniques.

## **A practical guide to complementary therapies for people living with HIV**

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, 2004  
CIR 615.5 PRA CAT 2004

An introduction to a variety of complementary therapies and their potential use to HIV-positive people. Recommended resources and organizations are provided as well. To read this guide online, visit [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca) (Click on 'Our publications' and then find 'A practical guide to complementary therapies for people living with HIV' under 'Practical Guides for People Living With HIV/AIDS').

## **Selecting a CAM practitioner**

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/practitioner/index.htm>  
An online fact sheet prepared by the U.S. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine that provides some guidance in selecting a complementary therapist. Some of the resources cited are meant for an American audience. An overview of complementary therapies is also available on the same website.

## **Vitamin power**

2004. *Positive Living*. December/January. p. 8.  
<http://www.napwa.org.au>  
An article that discusses how deterioration and early death due to HIV can be related to nutritional deficiencies, and how taking vitamins may be beneficial for individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

## **Who's minding the health food store?**

Study reveals PWHA's may receive inconsistent medical advice in stores. 2004. *Positive Side*. Vol. 12, no. 2. p. 2-3, 11.  
[http://www.pwn.bc.ca/cms/page\\_1413.cfm#1](http://www.pwn.bc.ca/cms/page_1413.cfm#1)  
An article that discusses a study conducted by researchers at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine and the University of Toronto that looks into the types of advice health food stores give to HIV-positive people with regards to using natural health products.

## **The Yoga Group: yoga for HIV/AIDS**

<http://www.yogagroup.org/>  
This American website includes links to articles on yoga and HIV/AIDS, a list of recommended yoga postures for people living with HIV/AIDS, and a listing of yoga classes for PHAs in a few Canadian cities, including Toronto.

# Complementary Therapies at PWA & ACT

## PWA

### **Financial Assistance for Complementary Therapies**

*PWA recognizes that there can be high costs associated with Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Our financial assistance program can help by reimbursing for costs associated with treatment or medication related purchases. Please contact your case manager at PWA for more details at 416-506-1400.*

### **Treatment Questions?**

Rebecca Gower is PWA's Treatment Resources Coordinator and is available to answer any questions you may have regarding treatment issues, including complementary therapies. She can be contacted at 416-506-8606 ext. 627.

### **Energy Healing Workshop**

Held on the fourth Tuesday of every month in room 220 at 399 Church Street. The workshop provides PHAs with the opportunity to learn more about energy healing in a group setting with 7 trained practitioners. Call 416-506-8606 ext. 632 or send an email to [programs@pwatoronto.org](mailto:programs@pwatoronto.org) to register.

### **Yoga**

PWA offers several yoga classes including a beginner class on Mondays and intermediate classes on Tuesdays and Fridays. All classes are held at 4:30 p.m. Call PWA reception at 416-506-1400 to find out more.

### **Reiki + Therapeutic Touch**

Call PWA at 416-506-8606 ext. 632 for more information or to book an appointment with a trained practitioner.

## ACT

### **Art Therapy**

A 10 week group for men and women living with HIV/AIDS. Call 416-340-8484 ext. 283 for more information.

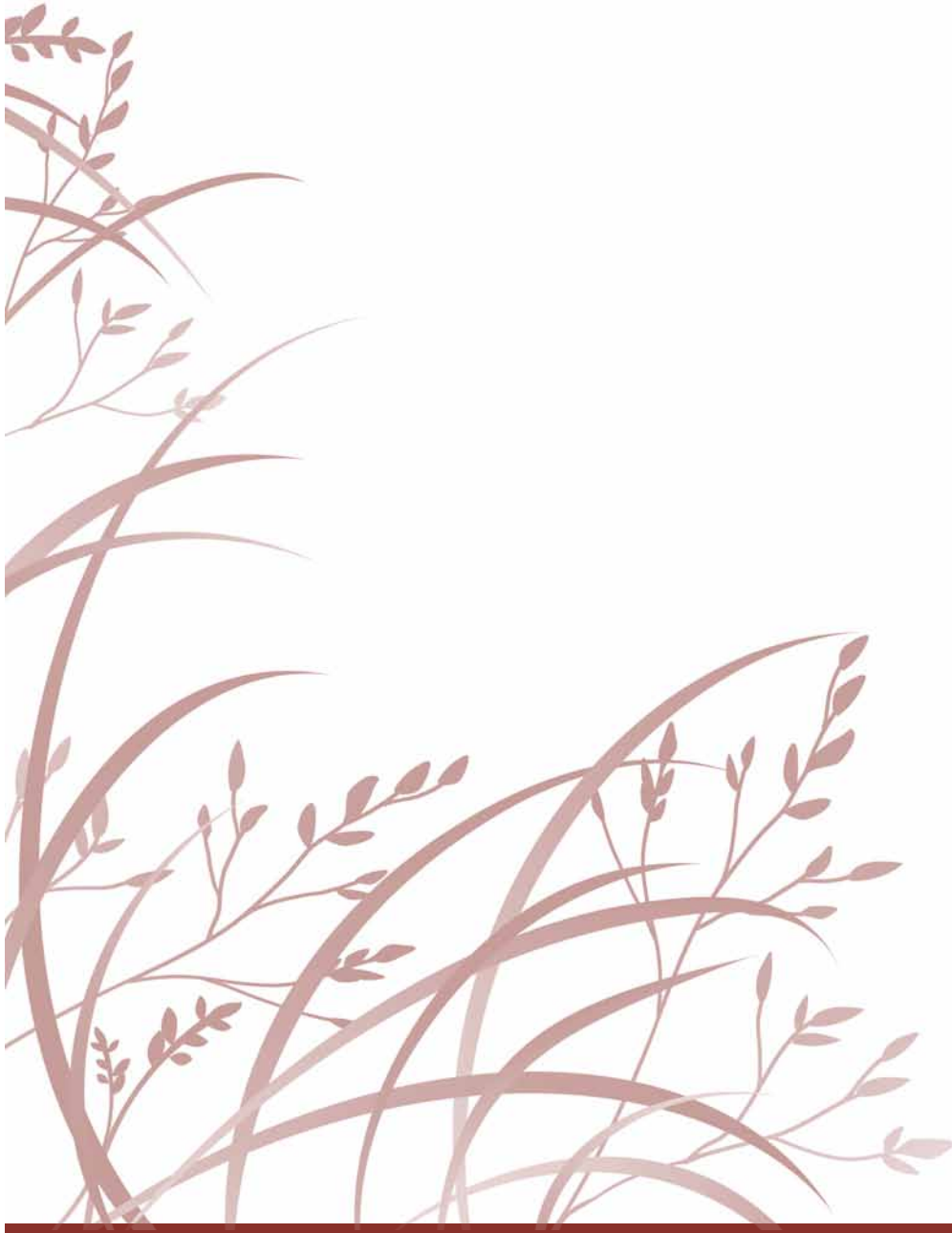
### **Nutrition Information Sessions**

Supported by the HIV/AIDS Wellness Advisory Network, ACT offers occasional nutritional information sessions hosted by a clinical dietitian. Call 416-340-8484 ext. 234 to find out more.

### **Community Naturopathic Clinic for people living with HIV/AIDS at the Sherbourne Health Centre**

Free and confidential naturopathic services. To find out more or to make an appointment, call 416-324-4187.

A partnership between ACT, PWA, the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine and the Sherbourne Health Centre.



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