

you. Do it whenever you feel stressed or in pain and your mind will feel clearer, your body more relaxed.

### **Meditation**

Meditation helps us to become more relaxed and thus more able to handle the stresses of PPS. To meditate start by taking the phone off the hook and sitting comfortably. Set an alarm on low volume to end the meditation in 20 minutes. Gently practice abdominal breathing as mentioned above for several minutes before starting the meditation.

### **Breath Counting Meditation**

Breathe in, through your nose and as you do so, count one silently to yourself. Then exhale counting two. Concentrate on the air going in and out of your nostrils and on your counting. Inhale counting three then exhale counting four. Inhale counting five and exhale counting six. Keep doing this all the way up to ten. When your attention wanders and you lose track of counting, simply start again at one. When you have counted to ten start again at one. Do this for twenty minutes. You will find as the mind calms down, the breath and heart will become quieter and calmer. Do not expect that you will be able to effortlessly lose all

your thinking processes. Meditation is not about losing your mind - it is about learning to focus the mind in an open and relaxed way so that you feel at peace

### **Chi Gung**

If you can use your arms then you may find Chi Gung classes helpful. Chi Gung is easier than Tai Chi and the gentle exercises incorporate stretching movements along with breathing exercises. In the Chinese view, aerobic exercise, although generating energy, ultimately loses it as energy is burned up and lost in perspiration. For polio survivors “going for the burn” is very detrimental to our polio weakened nervous system and muscles. Instead the goals of exercise are to improve circulation, increase oxygen uptake, build energy and release tension - Chi Gung accomplishes these goals. These are some of the many therapies and practices that can help us to relax and thus cope better with PPS. Have fun trying them out!

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# **Holistic Strategies for Coping with PPS Post-Polio Syndrome**

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## **Holistic Strategies for Coping with PPS**

Many polio survivors have had the experience of visiting their GP with some or all of the symptoms of PPS - fatigue, muscle and joint problems, respiratory issues, swallowing and speech difficulties, only to be told that there is no treatment available and they need to learn to live with these late effects of polio. Why bother then going to the GP at all? It is always a good idea to ask the GP for a checkup involving, if necessary, tests to exclude diseases such as diabetes and iron deficiency anemia which produce symptoms similar to those of PPS. Once there is a clear medical diagnosis of PPS, even if western medicine cannot offer much, holistic treatments and practices such as meditation are options that can offer relief. All of these methods are aimed at creating a state of deep relaxation and it is this that will help polio survivors to re-energise and find relief from aching muscles and joints.

## **Therapies**

Practitioners of holistic therapies are not going to offer a “quick fix cure” but instead offer treatments that are aimed at helping the patient to relax so that the body and mind can gently align with their

own inner capacity to restore energy and wellbeing. There are many therapies available these days. **Massage** is a good starting point - a gentle massage will relax and energise most people.

**Acupuncture** is a therapy that has been around for thousands of years and has a good track record in helping with pain management. **Reflexology** increases circulation, helps the body to get rid of toxins and produce endorphins - natural pain relieving chemicals. **Reiki** is a spiritual healing technique from the Orient and even if one is skeptical about energy transference there is no doubt that a visit to a Reiki practitioner is a very relaxing and thus a very worthwhile experience. Similarly, **Hypnotherapy** has been shown not only to enable deep relaxation but has been used in the treatment of IBS, Pain Management, Stress, Anxiety and Weight Management. The best way to find a therapist is by word of mouth. If you have a friend or someone whose opinion you respect who is undergoing a particular therapy, then ask them if they would recommend their therapist. Or an "umbrella" organization will be able to provide you with a list of registered practitioners in your area.

## **Abdominal Breathing**

Breathing exercises influence neurological function and help us feel much more relaxed and positive. Become aware of how you breathe on a day-to-day basis. Most of us tend to breathe shallowly from the upper chest, as if we are holding onto and restricting our breathing. As you learn to breathe more deeply and fully you will find that you release anxiety and tension more easily. Practice abdominal breathing on a daily basis and you will find it becomes second nature to you. With this type of breathing we breathe from the abdomen rather than the chest. In this way the lower part of the lungs expands and we receive more of that life giving oxygen.

Lie comfortably on the floor or on your bed and place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your stomach, then breathe out slowly, relaxing completely. Once your lungs are emptied, breathe in making sure this time that your left hand moves upwards - in other words your abdomen rises - before your chest does. Slowly and calmly breathe out. The crucial point in abdominal breathing is to ensure that as you breathe in the abdomen rises and as you breathe out it falls. Practice this twice a day for 10 minutes and it will become completely natural for