Alternative therapies for Parkinson’s Disease

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Presentation Outline

- What is an alternative therapy?
- Why are people interested in alternative therapies for PD?
- How do we evaluate new therapies or treatments?
- Herbs, Vitamins, and Minerals
- Mind and Body practices
- Recommended resources
- Questions
What is an “alternative therapy”? 

Standard

Alternative

Complementary
Why are people interested in alternative therapies for Parkinson’s?

- None of our current medical therapies slow down the damage.
- Dopamine replacement therapies have side effects and don’t treat many non-motor symptoms of Parkinson’s.
- Doctors tend to take a symptom-based approach instead of a holistic approach.
- Patients want to feel empowered and hopeful!
How do we evaluate treatments for Parkinson’s disease?

Evidence-based medicine: “the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of patients. It is the integration of the results from clinical research and clinical judgment.” — Gordon Guyatt
What is the “best” evidence?

- Systematic review
- Randomized controlled trials
- Cohort studies
- Case control studies
- Case reports or case series
- Expert opinion, anecdotes, animal studies

Strongest “best” evidence here

Weakest evidence here
How do we evaluate treatments for Parkinson’s disease?

- According to the best evidence available:
  - Is it helpful?
  - Is it harmful?
  - What are the costs?
  - Is it “worth it” for YOU?
Types of complementary and alternative therapies for PD

- **Natural products**: herbs, vitamins, minerals, probiotics, cannabis products
- **Mind and body practices**: acupuncture, massage, meditation, movement therapies, relaxation techniques, tai chi, yoga, dance, singing
- **Alternative medicine systems**: traditional Chinese or Korean medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, homeopathy, naturopathic medicine
Herbs, Vitamins and Minerals

- **Vitamin E**: an initial study showed a potential protective effect of Vitamin E + Vitamin C, however a better quality follow up study showed no effect.

- **Coq10**: one randomized blinded study showed a trend toward slowed progression but was not large enough to know for sure.

- **Creatine**: initially promising but large high-quality trial showed no benefit.
Herbs, Vitamins and Minerals

- **Uric acid (inosine):** shown to be safe and feasible, clinical trial ongoing

- **Mucuna bean:** one small but good quality trial in advanced PD showed good clinical effect but ½ didn’t tolerate, another trial by the same group showed similar effect and possibly better tolerance than C/L

- **Cannabis:** one trial of cannabidiol (CBD) in 21 patients showed a possible beneficial effect on quality of life, a crossover trial of cannabis extract in 17 patients showed no change in any symptoms
Mind and Body Practices

- **Acupuncture**: Only 3 good quality trials have been done in PD, no benefit compared to random needling

- **Massage**: one trial showed no change from baseline in the massage group, but trigger point pressure over 4 weeks improved motor function in a study of 36 patients

- **Alexander technique (postural awareness)** – fair quality study of 58 patients showed subjective benefit after 12 weeks, sustained at 6 month

- **Relaxation techniques/biofeedback**: small study of 20 patients showed no motor benefit
Mind and Body Practices

- **Tai chi**: 7 clinical trials in PD show that it is safe and feasible, the largest trial of 195 patients showed better balance and decreased falls compared to other exercise after 6 months.

- **Yoga**: one small study of 12 patients showed improved motor function and balance after 12 weeks.

- **Dance**: 5 trials of Tango in PD, best quality study found increased balance compared with conventional exercise.
Herbs, supplements: no high-quality evidence that there is benefit of any specific herb or supplement for PD (with exception of micuna, which may be a reasonable alternative to levodopa). In many cases, there is little research on potential side effects or drug interactions.

Mind and body practices are more likely to be helpful than harmful. Pick something that adds to your quality of life.

An “expert opinion” is still the lowest level of evidence! Ask if a clinical trial has been done in people like you.

With EVERY therapy, ask: Is it helpful? Is it harmful? What is the cost? Is it worth it for ME?
Recommended Resources for Patients

- [https://www.michaeljfox.org/](https://www.michaeljfox.org/) The Michael J Fox Foundation
- [https://parkinson.org/](https://parkinson.org/) Parkinson’s Foundation
- [https://briangrant.org/exercise-videos/](https://briangrant.org/exercise-videos/) Free exercise videos for Parkinson’s including boxing and Tai Chi
- [https://clinicaltrials.gov/](https://clinicaltrials.gov/) WAY more info than you’d ever need, but when I hear about a new therapy, I like to search here to see if there have been any clinical trials in patients with Parkinson’s
My sources for this talk
