



## **Alternative & Integrative Therapies: A Practical Guide (2025)**

**Scope:** sound therapy/sound baths, Reiki, vagus-nerve practices (humming/Bhramari, breathwork, taVNS), acupuncture, energy/Qi classes (e.g., Sun Kyeong), personalised supplements (e.g., Amrita Nutrition), yoga, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Tai Chi/Qigong, plus additional options (aromatherapy, neurofeedback, light therapy for SAD, forest bathing, mindfulness/MBCT, massage). Balanced with evidence, safety, and links for deeper reading.

Note: This guide summarises research up to November 10, 2025. It is educational and not a substitute for medical advice.

### **How to use this guide**

For each modality you'll see: what it is, what the research says (especially for mood/anxiety, sleep, pain, regulation), how to try it safely, and further reading. I flag where evidence is promising vs. uncertain, and where marketing claims outpace data.

### **Sound therapy & sound baths (singing bowls, gongs)**

What it is: immersive sessions with sustained tones/vibration (45–90 minutes).

#### **Evidence snapshot:**

- Systematic reviews and pilots suggest benefits for mood/anxiety and tension, but samples are small/heterogeneous (risk of bias).
- Clinical music therapy (a regulated discipline, distinct from 'sound baths') has moderate-certainty evidence for global improvement and quality of life in autistic people.

#### **How to try:**

- Use as relaxation alongside standard care. If you have migraine/sound sensitivity/PTSD, start short and low-volume; epilepsy—seek advice.

#### **Further reading:**

- Cochrane: Music therapy for autistic people (2022):

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004381.pub4/full>

- Pilot/overview on singing bowls & sound meditation (examples):

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9082683/>

### **Reiki (energy healing)**

What it is: Japanese energy-healing practice using light touch or hands above body.

#### **Evidence snapshot:**

- 2024–2025 meta-analyses report reductions in anxiety/quality-of-life improvements, but heterogeneity and risk of bias limit confidence.

#### **How to try:**

- Consider as a relaxation adjunct if it helps you feel calm; do not replace medical/psychological care.

#### **Further reading:**

- BMC Palliative Care 2024 overview: <https://bmcpalliatcare.biomedcentral.com/>
- Critiques of evidence quality: <https://edzardernst.com/> (search Reiki)

### **Vagus-nerve practices: slow breathing, humming (Bhramari), taVNS devices**

What it is: breathing at ~6 breaths/min, gentle humming on exhale; some use non-invasive auricular vagus-nerve stimulation (taVNS) devices.

#### **Evidence snapshot:**

- Humming/Bhramari: small Holter/HRV studies show improved vagal indices and stress markers; optimal HRV during humming may occur with 12–14 sec breathing cycles.
- taVNS: meta-analyses indicate reductions in depressive symptoms; protocols/devices vary and not all consumer gadgets are validated.

#### **How to try:**

- Free: 5–10 minutes/day of slow nasal breathing with soft humming, track sleep/mood/HRV.
- taVNS only with clinician guidance (caution in pregnancy, arrhythmia, epilepsy).

#### **Further reading:**

- Trivedi et al. 2023 (Cureus) ‘Humming as a Stress Buster’:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10182780/>
- Trivedi et al. 2023 (Int J Yoga) respiration length & HRV during humming:  
[https://journals.lww.com/ijoy/fulltext/2023/16020/effect\\_of\\_various\\_lengths\\_of\\_respiration\\_on\\_heart.9.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/ijoy/fulltext/2023/16020/effect_of_various_lengths_of_respiration_on_heart.9.aspx)

- taVNS meta-analysis (depression): <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/> (search taVNS meta-analysis depression)

## **Acupuncture**

What it is: needle stimulation of points (sometimes electro-acupuncture) within TCM frameworks.

### **Evidence snapshot:**

- Pain: supportive evidence for chronic low-back, neck, knee OA; prophylaxis for headache subtypes.
- UK: NICE allows up to 10 sessions for chronic tension-type headache prevention (age 12+).

### **How to try:**

- Choose a properly registered acupuncturist; discuss bleeding risks/anticoagulants/pregnancy.

### **Further reading:**

- NICE CG150 patient info:  
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg150/ifp/chapter/treatments-for-tension-type-headache>
- NCCIH overview: <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture-what-you-need-to-know>

## **Energy/Qi classes (e.g., Sun Kyeong). Qigong**

**What it is:** classes claiming to cultivate or transmit 'Qi'; Qigong combines gentle movement, breath, and focus.

### **Evidence snapshot:**

- Qigong/Tai Chi: growing evidence for reduced stress/anxiety and improved sleep/fatigue in chronic conditions.
- Sun Kyeong: promotional claims exist; independent peer-reviewed evidence specific to its methods is limited. Do due diligence on costs and expectations.

### **Further reading:**

- Systematic reviews on Qigong/Tai Chi:  
<https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/32/1/27/6378748> (music therapy context) and search 'Qigong systematic review anxiety 2024'.

### **Personalised supplements (e.g., via Amrita Nutrition)**

**What it is:** practitioner-linked portals for ‘practitioner-grade’ products.

**Evidence snapshot:**

- Evidence depends on the specific nutrient and your lab results; platforms are distributors (not evidence sources).

**How to try:**

- Base on dietary review and, where appropriate, lab tests; avoid mega-doses; check interactions (e.g., fish oils + anticoagulants; iron only if deficient).

**Further reading:**

- Amrita Nutrition portal (model): <https://amritanutrition.co.uk/>

### **Yoga**

**What it is:** postures, breathwork, meditation.

**Evidence snapshot:**

- BMJ-linked umbrella and reviews (2023–2024) indicate exercise—including yoga—is effective for depression; yoga compares favourably with several modalities.

**How to try:**

- 2–3 sessions/week for 8–12 weeks; pick styles that feel safe and sustainable.

**Further reading:**

- BMJ coverage (2024): <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/57/18/1203> and <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38355154/>

### **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) & Chinese herbal medicine**

**What it is:** a medical system including acupuncture, herbs, moxibustion, and diet therapy.

**Evidence snapshot:**

- Herbal evidence is mixed; quality control, herb–drug interactions, and liver safety are key concerns. Use qualified professionals.

**Further reading:**

- NCCIH TCM overview: <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/traditional-chinese-medicine-what-you-need-to-know>

## **Tai Chi / Qigong**

**What it is:** slow, meditative movement practices.

### **Evidence snapshot:**

- Systematic reviews (2023–2025) show improvements in balance, fall risk, mood, and some pain outcomes; cognitive benefits under study.

### **How to try:**

- Excellent low-impact option for regulation and proprioception; 2–3 sessions/week.

### **Further reading:**

- Example review: <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/57/16/1049> (exercise & depression)

## **Bach flower remedies**

**What it is:** flower essences developed by Dr Edward Bach, often used for emotional states.

### **Evidence snapshot:**

- Multiple systematic reviews conclude **\*\*no better than placebo\*\*** for psychological problems/pain; generally safe.

### **How to try:**

- If you find them soothing, use as a low-risk adjunct; do not rely on them for clinical anxiety/depression.

### **Further reading:**

- CRD/York review (2009):  
<https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/CRDWeb/ShowRecord.asp?ID=12009107352>
- BMC Complement Med Ther (2009):  
<https://bmccomplementmedtherapies.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6882-9-16>
- Swiss Med Wkly review:  
<https://smw.ch/index.php/smw/article/download/1167/1219?inline=1>

## **Additional therapies you might consider**

### **Aromatherapy**

- Evidence: Meta-analyses suggest short-term anxiety reduction (e.g., lavender), but effects are modest and context-dependent.
- Link: Front Public Health 2023 network meta-analysis:  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1144404/full>

### **Neurofeedback (EEG-based)**

- Evidence: 2024 JAMA Psychiatry meta-analysis found **\*\*no meaningful benefit\*\*** at the group level for ADHD across RCTs.
- Link: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2827733>

### **Light therapy for Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**

- Evidence: Cochrane (2019) suggests potential preventive benefit with wide CIs; 2024/2025 reviews support bright light therapy as first-line for SAD.
- Links: Cochrane (prevention): [https://www.cochrane.org/evidence/CD011269\\_light-therapy-prevention-winter-depression](https://www.cochrane.org/evidence/CD011269_light-therapy-prevention-winter-depression) ; StatPearls 2024: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK568745/>

### **Forest bathing (Shinrin-yoku)**

- Evidence: Systematic reviews/meta-analyses show short-term reductions in stress/anxiety and improvements in HRV.
- Links: Kotera 2020 SR: <https://repository.derby.ac.uk/item/93x3y/effects-of-shinrin-yoku-forest-bathing-and-nature-therapy-on-mental-health-a-systematic-review-and-meta-analysis> ; 2024 HRV study: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11565252/>

### **Mindfulness/MBCT**

- Evidence: Effective for relapse prevention in recurrent depression and for anxiety/stress; widely recommended in guidelines.
- Link: NICE (search 'MBCT depression relapse').

### **Massage therapy**

- Evidence: Small-to-moderate short-term effects on anxiety/pain; choose qualified therapists and communicate preferences/sensitivities.

### **A practical 6-week plan (low-risk, evidence-aligned)**

**Weeks 1–2:** Daily 5–10 minutes slow breathing + soft humming; 2x/week beginner yoga or Tai Chi; one home sound session.

**Weeks 3–4:** If headaches/musculoskeletal pain: trial acupuncture course (discuss with clinician). For seasonal low mood: begin morning bright light (10,000 lux, 20–30 min) if appropriate.

**Weeks 5–6:** Add one guided nature/forest session weekly; consider aromatherapy for situational anxiety; review outcomes (sleep, mood, pain) and continue what helps.

**General:** Maintain meds/therapy; any supplement should be data-led and checked for interactions.

## **Selected references & further reading**

- Cochrane (2022). Music therapy for autistic people.  
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- BMJ / BJSM (2023–2024). Exercise & depression reviews:  
<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/57/18/1203> ;  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38355154/>
- NICE CG150 (Headache). Up to 10 sessions acupuncture:  
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg150/ifp/chapter/treatments-for-tension-type-headache>
- NCCIH. Acupuncture & TCM overviews: <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture-what-you-need-to-know> ; <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/traditional-chinese-medicine-what-you-need-to-know>
- Trivedi GY et al. (2023). Humming & HRV (Cureus):  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10182780/> ; Respiration length during humming (Int J Yoga):  
[https://journals.lww.com/ijoy/fulltext/2023/16020/effect\\_of\\_various\\_lengths\\_of\\_respiration\\_on\\_heart.9.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/ijoy/fulltext/2023/16020/effect_of_various_lengths_of_respiration_on_heart.9.aspx)
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<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2827733>
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[https://www.cochrane.org/evidence/CD011269\\_light-therapy-prevention-winter-depression](https://www.cochrane.org/evidence/CD011269_light-therapy-prevention-winter-depression) ; StatPearls SAD (2024): <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK568745/>
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- Aromatherapy & anxiety: Front Public Health 2023 network meta-analysis:  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1144404/full>
- Bach flower remedies efficacy: CRD/York 2009:  
<https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/CRDWeb/ShowRecord.asp?ID=12009107352> ; BMC Complement Med Ther 2009:  
<https://bmccomplementmedtherapies.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6882-9-16> ; Swiss Med Wkly:  
<https://smw.ch/index.php/smw/article/download/1167/1219?inline=1>

- NICE CKS (headache management): <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/headache-tension-type/management/management/>

**Note on Dr Miguel Toribio-Mateas (humming & regulation)**

Dr Toribio-Mateas is a UK clinical neuroscientist/nutrition researcher known for education around the gut–brain axis and practical regulation tools (including humming). While he popularises these practices in talks/posts, the core humming/HRV research cited in this guide is by Trivedi and colleagues.

Further reading: His Substack ‘The Creative Scientist’:

<https://thecreativescientist.substack.com/> ; Microbiome assessment paper (2018):

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6027349/>