

Benefits of Massage from current research literature

Tiffany Field (2000), Director of the Touch Research Institutes, University of Miami School of Medicine and Nova South-Eastern University, Florida, USA has conducted research into the safety and efficacy of massage. From her studies massage has been associated with increased growth in pre-term babies, increased attentiveness in young students with attention deficit disorder, a reduction in pain in a variety of situations ranging from burn patients to PMS, childbirth and headaches, a reduction in the intensity of symptoms of depression and anxiety, enhancement of immune function and beneficial modulations of symptoms in autoimmune conditions. Field's work has been used as a guide for valid methods in education and has provided an evidence base for safe and effective practice.

Here are some reports on studies undertaken into the benefits of massage that have been compiled from websites in the Bibliography:

Medical school students at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-New Jersey Medical School who were massaged before an exam showed a significant decrease in anxiety and respiratory rates, as well as a significant increase in white blood cells and natural killer cell activity, suggesting a benefit to the immune system.

Preliminary results suggested cancer patients had less pain and anxiety after receiving therapeutic massage at the James Cancer Hospital and Research Institute in Columbus, Ohio.

Women who had experienced the recent death of a child were less depressed after receiving therapeutic massage, according to preliminary results of a study at the University of South Carolina.

Studies funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have found massage beneficial in improving weight gain in HIV-exposed infants and facilitating recovery in patients who underwent abdominal surgery. At the University of Miami School of Medicine's Touch Research Institute, researchers have found that massage is helpful in decreasing blood pressure in people with hypertension, alleviating pain in migraine sufferers and improving alertness and performance in office workers.

An increasing number of research studies show massage reduces heart rate, lowers blood pressure, increases blood circulation and lymph flow, relaxes muscles, improves range of motion, and increases endorphins (enhancing medical treatment). Although therapeutic massage does not increase muscle strength, it can stimulate weak, inactive muscles and, thus, partially compensate for the lack of exercise and inactivity resulting from illness or injury. It also can hasten and lead to a more complete recovery from exercise or injury.

Office workers massaged regularly were more alert, performed better and were less stressed than those who weren't massaged.

Massage therapy decreased the effects of anxiety, tension, depression, pain, and itching in burn patients.

Abdominal surgery patients recovered more quickly after massage.

Premature infants who were massaged gained more weight and fared better than those who weren't.

Autistic children showed less erratic behavior after massage therapy.

According to the AMTA, massage helps both physically and mentally.

"Often times people are stressed in our culture. Stress-related disorders make up between 80-and-90 percent of the ailments that bring people to family-practice physicians. What they require is someone to listen, someone to touch them, someone to care. That does not exist in modern medicine.

One of the complaints heard frequently is that physicians don't touch their patients any more. Touch just isn't there. Years ago massage was a big part of nursing. There was so much care, so much touch, so much goodness conveyed through massage. Now nurses for the most part are as busy as physicians. They're writing charts, dealing with insurance notes, they're doing procedures and often there is no room for massage any more.

I believe massage therapy is absolutely key in the healing process not only in the hospital environment but because it relieves stress, it is obviously foundational in the healing process any time and anywhere."

Joan Borysenko - Massage Journal Interview, Fall 1999

Physical Benefits of Therapeutic Massage

- Massage brings the client's awareness to the area being massaged, and awareness in itself can bring about healing.
- Massage acts to dilate the blood vessels and increase the efficiency of both supplying fresh nutrients to the tissues and eliminating metabolic wastes out of the body.
- Massage acts to promote the venous return of blood back toward the heart. This is particularly important for enhancing proper circulation within the extremities.
- Massage promotes deeper and easier breathing.
- Massage acts as a mechanical cleanser, helping to drain sluggish lymph material. Good lymphatic circulation is very important for ridding the body of toxic materials and strengthening the immune system
- Massage helps relieve stress and aid relaxation and can have a stimulating or sedative effect on the nervous system depending on: the type of massage given, the duration of actual massage time, and the present state of the nervous system.
- Massage can reduce blood pressure, relieve tension-related headaches and effects of eye-strain

- Massage improves muscle tone by mechanically stimulating inherent reflexes found within muscle fibres. This is particularly important to those who do not obtain adequate daily exercise due to a sedentary lifestyle or long periods of convalescence.
- Massage helps relieve muscle tension and stiffness thus reducing muscle spasms
- Through the use of transverse massage strokes massage can help to prevent adhesions from occurring in between the muscle fibers. When muscle fibers start to adhere together it can act to restrict their full range of motion.
- Massage stretches the connective tissues which surround and support the musculature. This promotes its health and prevents it from adhering to the muscle.
- Massage can therefore provide greater joint flexibility and range of motion
- Massage can alleviate discomfort during pregnancy
- Massage can enhance athletic performance by fostering faster healing of strained muscles and sprained ligaments, reducing stiffness, pain and swelling found within the joints due to injury and reducing the formation of excessive scar tissue
- Massage can therefore treat injuries caused during sport or work
- Massage enhances the health and nourishment of skin
- Massage improves posture by bringing awareness to imbalance in musculoskeletal structures
- Massage can help treat musculoskeletal problems and aid in rehabilitation post operative and after injury

(Source: AMTA)

Mental Benefits of Massage Therapy

- Fosters peace of mind
- Promotes a relaxed state of mental alertness
- Helps relieve mental stress
- Improves ability to monitor stress signals and respond appropriately
- Enhances capacity for calm thinking and creativity

- Emotional Benefits
- Satisfies needs for caring nurturing touch
- Fosters a feeling of well-being
- Reduces levels of anxiety