

Massage Therapy for Pain Management

Research Supports Massage Therapy for Pain Management

Massage therapy, compared to no treatment, should be strongly recommended as a pain management option. Massage therapy is conditionally recommended for reducing pain, compared to other sham or active comparators, and improving mood and health-related quality of life, compared to other active comparators.

Pain is multi-dimensional and may be better addressed through an integrative approach. Massage therapy is commonly used among people seeking pain management and research has generally supported its use. But, until now there has been no published, rigorous review of the available research and evidence for its efficacy for people with various types of pain.

Research Analysis Indicates Massage Therapy Strongly Recommended for Pain Management



Based on the evidence, massage therapy can provide significant improvement for pain, anxiety and health-related quality of life for those looking to manage their pain. This is the conclusion of a collaborative meta-analysis of research on massage therapy for pain conducted by the **Samueli Institute** and commissioned by the **Massage Therapy Foundation**, with support from the **American Massage Therapy Association**. The first part of the three-part review and analysis published online by the journal *Pain Medicine*, indicates:

- Pain is a major public health concern, affecting approximately 100 million Americans
- It is recognized as the most compelling reason to seek medical attention, and accounts for approximately 80% of physician visits
- Chronic pain accounts for approximately \$600 billion in annual health care expenditures and lost productivity
- This annual cost is greater than the cost of other national priority health conditions, highlighting the significant economic burden of pain

Research Roundup: Massage is Good Medicine

Two independent clinical studies demonstrate that massage therapy eases pain and improves recovery time for people suffering from lower back injuries and burns.

"These findings emphasize what professional massage therapists know: massage is good medicine," said Nancy Porambo, AMTA President. "Massage therapy provided by a professional massage therapist is being increasingly viewed by physicians and their patients as an important component of integrated care. Nearly 9 of 10 American consumers believe that massage can be effective in reducing pain. And, a growing body of clinical research continues to validate that."

Massage Therapy Can Help Low-Back Pain

In a study¹ published in the February 2014 edition of *Scientific World Journal*, researchers investigated whether chronic low-back pain therapy with massage therapy alone was as effective as combining it with non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs. The study was conducted on 59 individuals divided into two groups, all of whom suffered from low-back pain and were diagnosed with degenerative changes of the spine, other intervertebral disc diseases or spine pain.

In both patient groups, the pain measured was significantly reduced and the level of disability showed significant improvement compared to the baseline. **Researchers concluded massage had a positive effect on patients with chronic low-back pain and propose that the use of massage causes fast therapeutic results and that, in practice, it could help to reduce the use of anti-inflammatory drugs in the treatment of chronic low-back pain.**

Massage to Reduce Burn Scars

In a separate study² published in the journal *Burns*, 146 burn patients with scars were randomly divided into two groups. All patients received standard rehabilitation therapy for hypertrophic scars—known as raised scars that are typically red, thick and may be itchy or painful—and 76 patients received additional burn scar rehabilitation massage therapy. Both before and after the treatment, researchers assessed the scar characteristics for thickness, melanin, erythema, transepidermal water loss (TEWL), sebum, and elasticity.

While both groups showed improvement, the massage group showed a significant decrease in scar thickness, melanin, erythema, and TEWL. There was a significant intergroup difference in skin elasticity with the massage group showing substantial improvement.

Researchers concluded that burn rehabilitation massage therapy is effective in improving pain, itching, and scar characteristics in hypertrophic scars after a burn.

References

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Massage Therapy Can Help Lower Blood Pressure & Control Stress

In a recent study in the **International Journal of Preventive Medicine**, researchers concluded massage therapy could serve as an effective intervention in controlling blood pressure in pre-hypertensive women. The study showed that the immediate results of lowered blood pressure lasted up to 72 hours after massage.¹

A separate study in the same publication had similar findings; those that received regular Swedish massage therapy over a period of four weeks had significantly lower blood pressure than those who did not have a massage.²

Massage Therapy Research Roundup: Heart Health

Many already view massage as an important approach to relieving muscle pain or as a means to relax. However, working with a qualified massage therapist can also play a significant role in improving cardiovascular health as evidenced by a growing body of research, according to the **American Massage Therapy Association**.

The American Heart Association warns against the risks of high blood pressure which can lead to cardiovascular issues including stroke, heart disease and kidney failure. With proactive management of high blood pressure, individuals can lower their chance of developing these conditions.³

A multitude of recent research shows a direct correlation between massage therapy and improved cardiovascular health.



Massage Therapy for Reduced Pain, Anxiety and Muscular Tension in Cardiac Surgery Patients

Research published in **The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery** indicates that massage therapy can significantly reduce pain, anxiety and muscular tension, as well as enhance relaxation and satisfaction after cardiac surgery.⁴

REFERENCES

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² SupaAt, Izzreen, Zaiton Zakaria, Oreh Maskon, Amilia Aminuddin, and Nor Anita Megat Mohid Nordin. "Effects of Swedish Massage Therapy on Blood Pressure, Heart Rate, and Inflammatory Markers in Hypertensive Women." *International Journal of Preventative Medicine*. (2013): 1-8. Web.

³ "My Life Check - Life's Simple 7™." *My Life Check - Life's Simple 7™*. American Heart Association, n.d. Web. 02 Oct. 2014.

⁴ Bauer BA, Cutshall SM, Wentworth LJ, Engen D, Messner PK, Wood CM, Brekke KM, Kelly RF, Sundt TM 3rd. Effect of massage therapy on pain, anxiety, and tension after cardiac surgery: a randomized study. *Complement Ther Clin Pract*. 2010 May;16(2)

Massage for Pain & Anxiety in Cancer Patients

New Research Analysis Indicates Massage Therapy Shows Promise for Pain & Anxiety in Cancer Patients

Massage therapy shows promise for reducing pain intensity/severity, fatigue, and anxiety in cancer populations.

This is the conclusion of a collaborative meta-analysis of research on massage therapy for pain conducted by **Samueli Institute** and commissioned by the **Massage Therapy Foundation**, with support from the **American Massage Therapy Association**. This review and analysis is published in the journal *Pain Medicine*.

Massage Therapy Can Benefit Cancer Patients

The study concludes that patients should consider massage therapy as a therapeutic option to help manage their cancer pain. Pain is the most common and debilitating symptom among cancer patients. While the exact prevalence of pain varies depending on the type and stage of cancer, research shows that pain generally affects over 50 percent of those undergoing cancer therapy and up to 90 percent with advanced cancer experience pain.

Cancer pain can range from mild to severe and from acute to chronic. And, patients often experience significant anxiety and depression, as well as insomnia, fatigue, weakness and other complications that can exacerbate each other, impair normal daily activities and negatively impact quality of life.





Massage Therapy Research Roundup

Massage therapy is commonly used for relaxation and pain relief, in addition to a variety of health conditions such as osteoarthritis,¹ fibromyalgia,² and inflammation after exercise.³ It's important to know that massage therapy can also be an effective therapy for many aspects of mental health. In fact, recent research suggests that symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression (all associated with mental health) may be directly affected with massage therapy.

Below are some recent research findings which highlight the role of massage therapy in mental health and wellness, compiled by the American Massage Therapy Association.

Massage Therapy for the Treatment of Depression in Individuals With HIV

Research published in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*⁴ indicates that massage therapy can reduce symptoms of depression for individuals with HIV disease. The study lasted eight weeks, and results show massage significantly reduced the severity of depression beginning at week four and continuing at weeks six and eight. American Massage Therapy Association President Winona Bontrager says of the study, "This research suggests that regular therapeutic massage could be a useful tool in the integrated treatment of depression for patients with HIV."

Massage Therapy to Reduce Anxiety in Cancer Patients Receiving Chemotherapy

Research published in *Applied Nursing Research*⁵ shows that back massage given during chemotherapy can significantly reduce anxiety and acute fatigue. "This research demonstrates the potential value of massage therapy within the full cancer treatment spectrum, particularly during the often mentally and physically exhausting chemotherapy process," says American Massage Therapy Association President Winona Bontrager.

Massage Therapy for Reduced Anxiety and Depression in Military Veterans

Research published in *Military Medicine*⁶ reports that military veterans indicated significant reductions in ratings of anxiety, worry, depression and physical pain after massage. Analysis also suggests declining levels of tension and irritability following massage. This pilot study was a self-directed program of integrative therapies for National Guard personnel to support reintegration and resilience after return from Iraq or Afghanistan.

Massage Therapy for Nurses to Reduce Work-Related Stress

Research published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*⁷ shows that massage for nurses during work hours can help to reduce stress and related symptoms, including headaches, shoulder tension, insomnia, fatigue, and muscle and joint pain. "This study affirms the important role massage therapy can play in the work setting, in this case to ease stress for health care providers who, in turn, can better provide optimal patient care," says American Massage Therapy Association President Winona Bontrager.

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Massage Therapy Research Roundup

Pain can negatively affect a person's quality of life and impede recovery from illness or injury. It can be occasional, acute or chronic, depending on whether the person has had an accident, is suffering from musculoskeletal dysfunction, or lack of movement or mobility.¹ It's important for individuals to consult with their health care provider for a diagnosis and advice on the best treatment options for their condition. One pain management strategy to consider is massage therapy, which recent research suggests may be a helpful aid for manually controlling symptoms in people suffering metastatic cancer and rheumatoid arthritis, among other illnesses, as well as post-cardiac surgery pain.

Below are some recent findings which highlight the role of massage therapy in pain management, compiled by the American Massage Therapy Association.

Massage Therapy for Improved Pain and Sleep in Metastatic Cancer Patients

Research published in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*² found that therapeutic massage at home for metastatic cancer patients can improve their overall quality of life by reducing pain and improving sleep quality. American Massage Therapy Association President Winona Bontrager says of the study, "These findings suggest that cancer patients can also benefit from professional massage, both physically and mentally, providing the necessary comfort during advanced stages of the disease."

Massage Therapy for Decreased Pain in Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients

Research published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*³ showed that adults with rheumatoid arthritis may feel a decrease in pain, as well as greater grip strength and range of motion in wrists and large upper joints, after receiving regular moderate-pressure massages during a 4-week period. "This research demonstrates the potential value of massage therapy for the estimated 1.3 million Americans living with this chronic condition, with women outnumbering men 2.5-1⁴. Rheumatoid arthritis sufferers are encouraged to speak with their health care provider about the possibility of incorporating routine massage therapy into their current treatment plan to help manage painful symptoms," says American Massage Therapy Association President Winona Bontrager.

Massage Therapy for Reduced Pain, Anxiety and Muscular Tension in Cardiac Surgery Patients

Research published in *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*⁵ indicates that massage therapy can significantly reduce pain, anxiety and muscular tension, as well as enhance relaxation and satisfaction after cardiac surgery. The American Massage Therapy Association acknowledges that cardiac surgery recovery is a very crucial time a patient must endure and this study further suggests that massage therapy can be a useful aid in making the road to recovery an easier journey.

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Massage Therapy Research Roundup

A growing body of evidence shows that massage therapy can be effective for a variety of health conditions. Massage is rapidly becoming recognized as an important part of health and wellness, and research is indicating some of what takes place in the body during massage therapy.

Here are some recent findings on the benefits of massage therapy for health and medical reasons, compiled by the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA).

Massage Therapy for Pain of Osteoarthritis of the Knee

Research supported by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) showed that sixty minute sessions of Swedish massage once a week for those with osteoarthritis of the knee significantly reduced their pain. Each massage therapy session followed a specific massage protocol. This is the latest published research study indicating the benefits of massage therapy for those with osteoarthritis of the knee.

Perlman AI, Ali A, Njike VY, et al. Massage therapy for osteoarthritis of the knee: a randomized dose-finding trial. *PLoS One*. 2012; 7(2):e30248.

Massage Therapy for Inflammation after Exercise

Research through the Buck Institute for Research on Aging and McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario indicates that massage therapy reduces inflammation of skeletal muscle acutely damaged through exercise. The study provides evidence for the benefits of massage therapy for those with musculoskeletal injuries and potentially for those with inflammatory disease, according to the lead author of the research.

J. D. Crane, D. I. Ogborn, C. Cupido, S. Melov, A. Hubbard, J. M. Bourgeois, M. A. Tarnopolsky, *Massage Therapy Attenuates Inflammatory Signaling After Exercise-Induced Muscle Damage*. *Sci. Transl. Med.* 4, 119ra13 (2012).

Massage Therapy for Chronic Low Back Pain

Research released in July 2011 expanded on previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of massage therapy for chronic low back pain. Researchers found that "patients receiving massage were twice as likely as those receiving usual care to report significant improvements in both their pain and function". The study was conducted over 10 weeks through Group Health Research Institute.

Cherkin DC, Sherman KJ, Kahn J, Wellman R, Cook AJ, Johnson E, Erro J, Delaney K, Deyo RA. A comparison of the effects of 2 types of massage and usual care on chronic low back pain: a randomized, controlled trial. *Ann Intern Med*. 2011 Jul 5;155(1):1-9.

Massage Therapy for Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a chronic syndrome characterized by generalized pain, joint rigidity, intense fatigue, sleep alterations, headache, spastic colon, craniomandibular dysfunction, anxiety, and depression. This study demonstrated that massage-myofascial release techniques improved pain and quality of life in patients with fibromyalgia.

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Massage Therapy for Surgical Pain

New Research Analysis Indicates Value of Massage Therapy for Surgical Pain

Based on the evidence, massage therapy can be effective for reducing pain intensity/severity and anxiety in patients undergoing surgical procedures.

This is the conclusion of a collaborative meta-analysis of research on massage therapy for pain conducted by **Samueli Institute** and commissioned by the **Massage Therapy Foundation**, with support from the **American Massage Therapy Association**. This review and analysis is published in the journal *Pain Medicine*.

Surgical-related Pain Management

Pain management is a critical and challenging issue for patients who are either about to undergo or recovering from surgical or operative procedures. If postoperative pain is effectively managed at the acute stage or during immediate postsurgical periods, patients are often able to recover uneventfully and return to their normal daily activities.

Chronic pain places significant psychosocial and economic burdens on patients and represents a major public health problem.



Massage Therapy Recommended for Pain & Anxiety

The study concludes that patients should consider massage therapy as a therapeutic option to help manage their pain and anxiety from surgical procedures.