



American Massage Therapy Association

Massage Therapy

More Than Pampering...

Words like “relaxation” and “pampering” are often used to describe a person’s idea of a good massage. In fact, 26 percent of the 39 million Americans who got a massage last year say it’s for relaxation or stress reduction, according to a recent survey commissioned by the American Massage Therapy Association® (AMTA®). Only 11 percent say it was to pamper themselves. Although relaxation plays an important role in one’s overall health and wellness, another 30 percent of those surveyed say they get massage therapy for medical/health reasons specifically.

Massage therapy has been shown to address serious health issues by relieving symptoms associated with a variety of conditions. Here’s a look at just some of the ways in which massage therapy can be effective.

Relieve Back Pain

More than 100 million Americans suffer from lower-back pain, and nearly \$25 billion a year is spent in search of relief. A 2003 study showed that massage therapy produced better results and reduced the need for painkillers by 36 percent when compared to other therapies, including acupuncture and spinal modification. Today, massage therapy is one of the most common ways people ease back pain.

Source: *Annals of Internal Medicine*, June 3, 2003

Treat Migraines

Of the 45 million Americans who suffer from chronic headaches, more than 60 percent suffer from migraines. For many, it’s a distressing disorder that is triggered by stress and poor sleep. In a recent study, massage therapy recipients exhibited fewer migraines and better sleep quality during the weeks they received massage, and the three weeks following, than did participants that did not receive massage therapy. Another study found that in adults with migraine headaches massage therapy decreased the occurrence of headaches, sleep disturbances and distress symptoms. It also increased serotonin levels, believed to play an important role in the regulation of mood, sleep and appetite.

Sources: *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, August 2006; *International Journal of Neuroscience*, 1998.

Ease Symptoms of Carpal Tunnel

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a progressively painful condition that causes numbness and tingling in the thumb and middle fingers. Traditional treatments for carpal tunnel range from a wrist brace to surgery. However, a 2004 study found that carpal tunnel patients receiving massage reported significantly less pain, reduced symptoms and improved grip strength than those patients who did not receive massage.

Source: Touch Research Institute, University of Miami School of Medicine, *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies*, 8, 9-14.

Reduce Anxiety

An estimated 20 million Americans suffer from depression. A review of more than a dozen massage studies concluded that massage therapy helps relieve depression and anxiety by affecting the body’s biochemistry. In the studies reviewed, researchers measured the stress hormone cortisol in participants before and immediately after massage and found that the therapy lowered levels by up to 53 percent. Massage also increased serotonin and dopamine, and neurotransmitters that help reduce depression.

Source: Touch Research Institute, University of Miami School of Medicine.



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Alleviate Side Effects of Cancer

Massage therapy is increasingly being applied to symptoms experienced by cancer patients, such as nausea, pain and fatigue. Researchers at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center asked patients to report the severity of their symptoms before and after receiving massage therapy. Patients reported reduced levels of anxiety, pain, fatigue, depression and nausea, even up to two days later.

Source: *Journal of Pain & Symptom Management*, September 2004.

In a study of breast cancer patients, researchers found that those who were massaged three times a week reported lower levels of depression, anxiety and anger, while increasing “natural killer” cells and lymphocytes that help to battle cancerous tumors.

Source: Touch Research Institutes, University of Miami School of Medicine, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, Volume 57, Issue 1, Pages 45-52, July 2004.

Lower Blood Pressure

Hypertension, if left unchecked, can lead to organ damage. Preliminary research shows that hypertensive patients who received three 10-minute back massages a week had a reduction in blood pressure, compared to patients who simply relaxed without a massage.

Source: *Biological Research For Nursing*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 98-105 (2005).

Find a Massage Therapist

The benefits of massage therapy are far-reaching, but finding a trained massage therapist committed to continuing professional development is essential for experiencing those benefits. AMTA’s Find a Massage Therapist® offers a free, professional massage therapist locator and safety tips at www.findamassagetherapist.org. Look for an AMTA professional massage therapist.

For more information, please contact Matt Flesch at 312-233-1216 or matt.flesch@edelman.com.