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Massage + Stress

Stress—the one word that can have a big impact on your health and well-being. The more we learn about how stress affects people, the more we understand the importance of finding reliable ways of finding relief.

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One of the tricky things about stress is the breadth of the effects. In other words: Stress can, and often does, affect the entire person. From physical symptoms to changes in mood and behavior, stress can wreak havoc on a person's well-being, and they may not be aware it's the cause.

Awareness—and finding effective ways to deal with stress—are key.

Some Recent Research: Massage Therapy for Decreasing Stress in Cancer Patients

A recent pilot study to examine how massage therapy might affect the stress levels and quality of life in brain tumor patients showed promising results.



→Study methods: The prospective, single-arm

intervention study comprised 25 patients recently diagnosed with a primary brain tumor who reported experiencing stress. Stress levels and quality of life were measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-Brain, both of which were filled out by study participants at baseline, after weeks one through four, as well as one week after the final massage session.

→Protocol: Participants were given a total of eight massages over a four-week period.

→Results: At baseline, at least 75 percent of participants reported a variety of concerns, including sadness, fatigue, worry, nervousness, pain and sleep. At least 50 percent reported having other concerns, as well: insurance, depression, dry or itchy skin, work, transportation, eating and nausea.

As a group, levels of stress dropped significantly between weeks two and three, and this trend continued through week four. At the end of the fourth week, the PSS-10 scores for all participants were below the threshold for being considered stressed, and participants reported significant improvements in three test domains: emotional well-being, additional brain tumor concerns, and social/family well-being.

The participants' PSS-10 scores did increase one week after receiving the final massage, but not above their baseline score. Researchers concluded: "The results of this study suggest that the effect of massage therapy on stress may be additive or cumulative, and that once massage therapy is discontinued, stress returns, but not to original levels."

References

Keir ST and Saling JR. Pilot study of the impact of the massage therapy on sources and levels of distress in brain tumor patients. *BMJ Supportive & Palliative Care*. 2012; 2: 363–36.

What the Research Says

A wide variety of research has been done on the benefits of massage therapy. For more information, visit the Research section of the AMTA's website.