

Research Roundup

The Benefits of Massage Therapy for Cancer Patients

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), nearly 2 million people will be diagnosed with cancer in the United States each year.¹ The good news is that more people are surviving the disease than ever before due to better treatments and gains in early detection. These treatments including surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, can have great success but can also have debilitating side effects that often make cancer even more physically and emotionally taxing.

Explore recent research studies on how massage therapy can ease symptoms and make an important difference for cancer patients, compiled by the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA).

Pain Reduction for Breast Cancer Patients After Oncology Massage Therapy

An integrative oncology team at Levine Cancer Institute recently collected data and published a study on pain improvement after massage therapy and healing touch in breast cancer patients. This observational retrospective study compares healing touch and oncology massage as non-pharmacologic pain interventions for people with breast cancer. Of the 407 study participants, 43% received oncology massage and 57% received healing touch therapy. Both groups reported statistically significant reductions in their pain levels.²

Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) Helps Relieve Lymphedema Symptoms in Cancer Patients

Lymphedema is chronic swelling in the body that commonly occurs after the removal of lymph nodes or from cancer treatments. A 2022 study considering the effects of manual lymphatic drainage on upper limb lymphedema after breast cancer surgery, indicates that MLD had a positive effect on lymphedema. Participants showed significant improvement in hand and arm symptoms, resulting in reduced swelling and discomfort, and a decreased risk of cellulitis.³

Oncology Massage Improves the Symptoms of Chemotherapy-Induced Neuropathy

Chemotherapy can cause neuropathy, which is weakness, numbness and pain from nerve damage. In a 2022 study of oncology massage therapy, approved by the MD Anderson Cancer Center to treat chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy, 88% of participants agreed that their neuropathy improved after massage. The patients that received massage therapy three times a week had clinically and statistically significant better relief of neuropathy symptoms versus the group that received massage two times a week.⁴

Massage Therapy Helps Empower Cancer Patients

The unpredictable nature of cancer can sometimes make patients feel powerless. By reducing isolation, easing symptoms and relieving stress, massage therapy can help cancer patients regain a sense of control and manage their own self-care at a time when they need it most. From pain management to relieving lymphedema, massage therapy has been proven to be an important part of integrative care for cancer patients.

- ¹ Cancer Facts & Figures 2023, American Cancer Society, Atlanta, Georgia.
- ² Gentile D, Boselli D, Yaguda S, Greiner R, Bailey-Dorton C. "Pain improvement after healing touch and massage in breast cancer: An observational retrospective study." 2021 Mar;14(1):12-20. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7892332/>
- ³ Chmelova K, Novackova M. "Effect of manual lymphatic drainage on upper limb lymphedema after surgery for breast cancer." Ceska Gynekol. 2022;87(5):317-323. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36316211/>
- ⁴ Lopez G, Eng C, Overman M, Ramirez D, Liu W, Beinhorn C, Sumler P, Prinsloo S, Li Y, Eduardo B, and Lorenzo C. "A randomized pilot study of oncology massage to treat chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy." Sci Rep. 2022;12:19023. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9643426/>

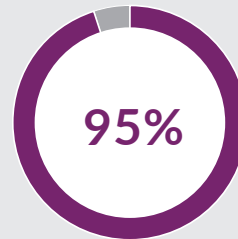
How to Find a Professional Massage Therapist

Finding a professional massage therapist is vital to a positive massage therapy experience. AMTA massage therapists have demonstrated a level of ability through education and/or testing, adhere to a code of ethics and meet continuing education requirements.

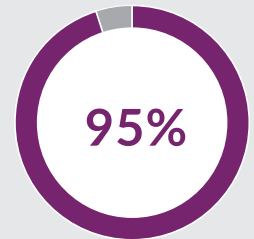
Find a professional massage therapist with AMTA's free locator service at [findamassagetherapist.org](https://www.findamassagetherapist.org).

AMTA Consumer Survey Facts

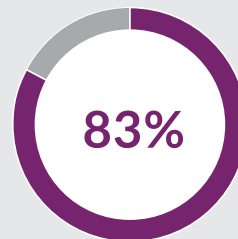
More consumers are incorporating massage therapy into their regular health and wellness routines to help manage medical conditions:



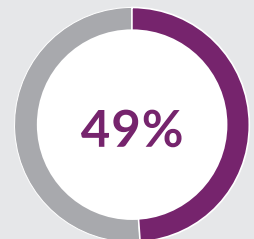
of individuals view massage as being beneficial to overall health and wellness



of individuals believe that massage can be effective in reducing pain



of consumers surveyed claim that their primary reason for receiving a massage was medical (42%) or mental health related (41%)



of people say their doctor has recommended they get a massage