



9 Surprising Health Benefits of Massage

By Jane Wilkens Michael on July 14, 2014

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It goes without saying that massages feel pretty darn good, whether they're coming from a trained licensed massage therapist or your significant other. Unfortunately, professional massages come with a hefty price-tag, one that most of us aren't willing to shell out on a regular basis. But far from being a frivolous luxury reserved for the rich and famous, massages actually come with a litany of proven health benefits. Still not convinced? Read on!

The first, and most well-known, benefit of massage is the relief of muscle tension and, beyond that, injury prevention—which is why elite athletes flock to the massage table in droves. What's more, massage might boost the immune system, manage chronic pain, and alleviate anxiety and depression. Furthermore, research over the past ten years confirms that massage is also considered the perfect antidote for stress. To that end, and in the right hands (pun intended), the recuperative and pampering powers of massage make it the perfect gift for such special occasions as birthdays, anniversaries—and, of course, Mother's Day!

Today, massage therapy continues to impact people in positive ways and comes with a raft of research that confirms its ever-expanding role in our overall well-being. Says Nancy Porambo, President of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA): "Professional massage therapy is being increasingly viewed by physicians and their patients as an important component of integrated care. Nearly 9 of 10 American consumers we surveyed believe that massage can be effective in reducing pain. And, a growing body of research continues to validate that."

According to Dr. Keri Peterson, a board certified internal medicine physician affiliated with New York City's Lenox Hill Hospital and Mount Sinai Medical Center, "There is more and more clinical evidence that shows that massage therapy can be effective for a variety of health conditions, and massage is rapidly becoming recognized as an important part of health and wellness."

To illustrate the doctor's point, here are nine additional health and medical benefits that you might not be aware of, and the studies that back them up:

Helps lower back pain.

In a study conducted through Group Health Institute and published in the February 2014 edition of *Scientific World Journal*, researchers investigating whether chronic low-back pain therapy with massage therapy alone was as effective as combining it with non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs, found that patients receiving massage were twice as likely as those receiving usual care to report significant improvements in both their pain and function. Massage patients also reported that they were able to reduce the amount of OTC anti-inflammatory medications they were taking.

Lessens inflammation after exercise.

Research through the Buck Institute for Research on Aging and McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, indicated that massage therapy lessens inflammation of skeletal muscles acutely damaged through exercise.

Alleviates the pain of rheumatoid arthritis.

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.

Relieves the pain of osteoarthritis.

Research supported by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) showed that for those with osteoarthritis of the knee, sixty minute sessions of Swedish massage once a week significantly reduced their discomfort.

Improves balance, neurological, and cardiovascular measures in older adults.

Research published in the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork* found that older adults who receive massage therapy for up to six weeks could benefit from decreased blood pressure and improved stability.

This study suggests that regular massage therapy can produce several advantages for the older generation, including a relaxation effect for the entire body, lower blood pressure, decreased stress and improved balance.

Decreases stress in cancer patients.

According to research published in *BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care*, massage therapy can have a positive influence on the quality of life of people suffering serious illnesses such as brain cancer. These study results suggest that massage therapy can improve physical as well as emotional well-being in patients with late stage disease. When used in combination with standard care, massage can also help reduce stress, anxiety, pain and fatigue.

Reduces anxiety in cancer patients receiving chemotherapy.

Studies 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.

Alleviates pain from fibromyalgia.

According to the AMTA's own 2011 study, myofascial release techniques (often called deep tissue massage) improve pain and quality of life in patients with fibromyalgia, a chronic disease characterized by generalized pain, fatigue, and depression.

Reduces burn scars.

In a study published in the March issue of the journal *Burns*, researchers concluded that burn rehabilitation massage therapy was effective in improving the pain, itching, and scar characteristics in hypertrophic scars after a burn.

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