

## Enhancing Your Health With Therapeutic Massage

Whether seeking relief for a medical condition, searching for a method to help deal with the stresses of daily life or wanting to maintain good health, more and more Americans are turning to therapeutic massage.

Massage doesn't just feel good. Research shows it reduces the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, increases blood circulation and lymph flow, relaxes muscles, improves range of motion, and increases endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. Therapeutic massage may enhance medical treatment and helps people feel less anxious and stressed, relaxed yet more alert.

“Massage is to the human body what a tune-up is to a car.”

– Chicago Tribune.

Current research shows people are getting more massages, and that therapeutic massage has become mainstream, appealing to everyone from young adults to seniors. People are experiencing the therapeutic benefits of massage and report getting massages mostly to relax, relieve aches and pains, and help reduce stress.

“Massage therapy has clearly been shown to me to be very beneficial, particularly in areas where conventional medicine has not been as successful, including chronic arthritis, musculoskeletal syndromes and chronic headache, among others.”

– Renslow Sherer, M.D., Director of the Cook County Hospital HIV Primary Care Center, Chicago

According to a 1996 survey of employees who regularly receive therapeutic massage onsite at Reebok International Ltd., 98 percent said it helped them reduce work-related stress; 92 percent said it increased alertness, motivation and productivity; 83 percent said it had in some cases sufficiently addressed a problem so medical attention was not necessary; and 66 percent said it had enabled them to stay at work when they would have otherwise gone home sick.

### How Can Massage be Medically Beneficial?

People find that therapeutic massage can help with a wide range of medical conditions, including:

- Allergies
- Anxiety and stress
- Arthritis (osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis)
- Asthma and bronchitis
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Chronic and temporary pain
- Circulatory problems
- Depression
- Digestive disorders, including spastic colon, constipation and diarrhea
- Headache, especially when due to muscle tension
- Insomnia
- Myofascial pain (a condition of the tissue connecting the muscles)
- Reduced range of motion
- Sinusitis
- Sports injuries, including pulled or strained muscles and sprained ligaments
- Temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ)

“Massage therapy is a complementary therapy, not alternative anymore. It's of tremendous benefit.”

– Brad Stuart, M.D., Hospice Medical Director for the Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice of Northern California

Although massage therapy does not increase muscle strength, it can stimulate weak, inactive muscles and, thus, partially compensate for the lack of exercise and inactivity resulting from illness or injury. It also can hasten and lead to a more complete recovery from exercise or injury.

Therapeutic massage may not be recommended in some cases, such as in people with:

- inflammation of the veins (phlebitis)
- infectious diseases
- certain forms of cancer
- some skin conditions
- some cardiac problems
- diabetes

# Equilibrium<sup>3</sup> Massage Therapy

If you have one of these or some other diagnosed medical condition, always check with your doctor before seeking a massage.

## **What Does Research Show About Massage Therapy?**

Research on the effects of massage therapy has been ongoing for more than 120 years. A surge in research over the past 20 years has resulted in more than 2,500 published studies.

At the University of Miami School of Medicine's Touch Research Institute, 70 studies on touch – the majority on massage therapy – have been published or are under way. Recent and ongoing research at some of the nation's hospitals, such as Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, is expanding knowledge of the benefits of massage for a variety of injuries and ailments.

## **Among research findings:**

- Massage increases activity level of the body's natural "killer cells", boosting the immune system.
- Office workers massaged regularly were more alert, performed better and were less stressed than those who weren't massaged.
- Massage therapy decreased the effects of anxiety, tension, depression, pain, and itching in burn patients.
- Abdominal surgery patients recovered more quickly after massage.
- Premature infants who were massaged gained more weight and fared better than those who weren't.
- Autistic children showed less erratic behavior after massage therapy.

“Massage therapy is beneficial for almost all diseases. Eighty percent of disease is stress-related, and massage reduces stress.”

– Sandra McLanahan, M.D., family practitioner, Buckingham, Va.

## **Physical Benefits of Therapeutic Massage**

- Helps relieve stress and aids relaxation
- Helps relieve muscle tension and stiffness
- Fosters faster healing of strained muscles and sprained ligaments; reduces pain and swelling; reduces formation of excessive scar tissue
- Reduces muscle spasms
- Provides greater joint flexibility and range of motion
- Enhances athletic performance
- Promotes deeper and easier breathing
- Improves circulation of blood and movement of lymph

fluids

- Reduces blood pressure
- Helps relieve tension-related headaches and
- Effects of eye-strain
- Enhances the health and nourishment of skin
- Improves posture
- Strengthens the immune system

## **Massage Therapy and Well-Being: Mental Benefits**

- Fosters peace of mind
- Promotes a relaxed state of mental alertness
- Helps relieve mental stress
- Improves ability to monitor stress signals and respond appropriately
- Enhances capacity for calm thinking and creativity
- Satisfies needs for caring – nurturing touch
- Fosters a feeling of well-being
- Reduces levels of anxiety
- Increases awareness of mind-body connection

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