

The Benefits of Massage



Massage therapy is a treatment approach which is growing in demand and popularity. It was once considered an alternative or fringe approach, but it is now becoming much more mainstream. This form of therapy involves hands-on techniques to increase circulation, relieve tension, reduce stress, relieve anxiety, improve sleep, and promote relaxation throughout the entire body, as well as many other benefits. The body's soft tissue areas include the muscles, tendons, ligaments and fascia.

Here are some possible benefits of Massage Therapy.

It Is Relaxing – When the body is tense and under stress, it produces unhealthy levels of the well-known stress hormone, cortisol, which can contribute to weight gain, sleeplessness, digestive problems, and headaches. Massage therapy has been shown to decrease cortisol levels in the body. This enables the body to enter a recovery mode. Moreover, this form of therapy also triggers lasting feelings of relaxation, improved mood, and reduced stress levels.

2. It Reduces Stress – Not only can massage therapy help with stress relief, but regular massage sessions over a prolonged period of time can boost energy levels, reduce pain, and stimulate individuals on physical as well as emotional levels.

3. It Can Help Lower Blood Pressure – Regular massage therapy sessions have been found to reduce blood pressure levels. In fact, some long-term studies have shown that a consistent massage program can reduce both systolic (upper number) and diastolic (lower number) blood pressure. Moreover, it can also reduce cortisol levels within the body. Furthermore, consistent massage sessions can also reduce trigger sources for anxiety, hostility, tension, and depression. In turn, lower blood pressure levels can also reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, and/or kidney failure, as well as many other health issues.

4. It Promotes Muscle Relaxation – The purpose of massage therapy is to target the source of the body's pain via eliminating tense muscles, increasing flexibility, and providing relaxation to the affected muscles as well as the body as a whole. Massage also promotes circulation to the

affected or injured muscles, which increases nutrients and oxygen to the damaged tissues. In turn, this increased activity to the affected sites reduces stiffness and edema (swelling) in the muscles and joints, as well as increases flexibility to help reduce pain. Moreover, this form of therapy also releases endorphins (pain-killing hormones), which boost the dopamine and serotonin levels in the body. These hormones assist the body in many ways—physically as well as emotionally. They promote healing, pain management, and feelings of euphoria, as well as help to calm the nerves.

5. It Can Help Improve Circulation – The long-term benefits of massage therapy are not to be underestimated. Improved circulation is part of a snowball effect that occurs in the body as a result of receiving regular massage therapy on a consistent basis. This is because proper circulation brings damaged, stiff, and tense muscles the rich blood supply they need to promote healing.

Massage also promotes improved circulation via the use of hands-on pressure, which moves the blood through the damaged and congested areas of the body. In turn, the release of this same pressure causes new blood to flow into tissues. Furthermore, the squeezing, twisting, and pulling action of the massage technique also removes lactic acid from the muscle tissues. As a result, this action improves the lymph fluid circulation, which carries metabolic waste products away from internal organs and muscles. In turn, this results in lower blood pressure levels and improved overall body function.

6. It Can Help Improve Posture – Many people experience back, neck, and muscle pain from a variety of sources. However, the primary cause of this pain results from poor posture. In fact, chronic back pain, which is the number one reason for missed work days and second most common cause of disability, is often the result of incorrect or poor posture while standing and/or sitting. Being overweight, poor posture, and repetitive or overuse movements can also contribute to the strain on the back and other potential problem areas. As a result, the added strain often causes spasms, pain, and tense muscles in the hips, glutes, back, neck, and legs.

Massage therapy can help get the body back into proper alignment. In fact, improving one's posture can be one of the most beneficial and relaxing aspects of massage therapy. Massage allows the body to relax and loosen the muscles made tense and sore via bad posture. In turn, this allows the body to position itself in its organic and pain-free posture. As part of a consistent massage therapy program, the body's muscles are loosened and relaxed. The joints have greater freedom, flexibility, range of motion, and pressure points are relieved. As a result, the body is able to position itself in an organic and healthy posture. In short, massage therapy helps to correct the positions and movements developed over time as a reaction to pain.

7. It Can Help Strengthen the Body's Immune System – Regular massage sessions provide many benefits to the human body. It is a well-known fact that individuals who experience high levels of stress are more vulnerable to illness and injury. When stress is combined with sleep disturbances and poor nutrition, the impact is directed at the body's immune system. Its ability

to naturally protect itself against infections, pathogens, and bacteria is greatly reduced. Some might wonder how massage therapy benefits the immune system. Studies have indicated that regular massage sessions not only help reduce stress, but can also boost the immune system's cytotoxic capacity (activity level of the body's natural "killer cells") and enhances the body's ability to deliver nourishment. Massage therapy can be a great addition to any exercise program. Much like regular exercise can keep the body fine-tuned, regular massage therapy can help keep the immune system strong and resilient.

Once considered an alternative or fringe approach, massage therapy is now much more mainstream and growing in popularity. More importantly, now that massage therapy is considered a mainstream treatment option, many insurance companies provide coverage for treatment sessions.

A recent study carried out on patients, which was recently shown on BBC's Trust me I'm a Doctor concluded the following. Dr Fulvio came across research which found that massage boosted the number of white blood cells in patient's suffering from HIV, a disease that causes a reduction in a type of white blood cell known as Lymphocytes. To see if massage might have the same effect in people without serious immune conditions, we invited 7 volunteers in for a massage. First we took a blood sample from each of them and analysed it for the number of Lymphocytes present. This served as a baseline reading. Next we asked them to lie down and relax for an hour, before taking another blood sample. This was so we could be sure that when we tested their levels after a massage, any changes in Lymphocyte count were due to the massage itself, not simply the effect of an hour's relaxation. Then came an hour's massage. Immediately after the session, we took a third and final blood test.

The results

Compared to the baseline results, the results from the group after the massage showed a 70 per cent boost in white blood cells. This was also a higher reading than we got from the volunteers simply relaxing. The immune system is complex, and it's not simply the case that increasing the white blood cell count in a person who already has healthy levels will improve their health. However lymphocytes do perform a wide array of functions in the body involved with growth and repair, which could in part explain why massage has been reported to help with so many conditions.

8) It can help to relieve pain - Massage seems to ease pain in several different ways. For starters, it can increase blood flow to sore, stiff joints and muscles, which are warmed by the extra circulation. As reported by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, studies have found that massage also triggers the release of natural painkillers called opioids in the brain. Studies also suggest that massage speeds up the flow of oxytocin, a hormone that relaxes muscles and encourages feelings of calmness and contentment. Massage may also change the way the brain senses pain. As Stanford neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky has said, the short, sharp sensations of a good massage can temporarily make the brain forget about other aches. There's little doubt that a good massage can ease pain and tightness in stressed, overworked muscles. Now there's growing evidence that it can also help relieve chronic (long-lasting) pain, especially the lower-back variety.

Muscles that are in spasm will be painful to the touch. The pain is caused by ischemic muscle tissue. Ischemia means the muscle is lacking proper blood flow, usually due to the muscle spasm. This in turn creates the following undesirable process:

- Because the muscle is not receiving enough blood, the muscle is also not receiving enough oxygen
- The lack of oxygen causes the muscle to produce lactic acid
- The lactic acid makes the muscle feel sore following physical activity.

After the muscle is relaxed through massage therapy, the lactic acid will be released from the muscle, and the muscle should start receiving enough blood and oxygen.

9) It can Increase flexibility - Poor flexibility is usually caused by muscle fatigue, tightness or inflammation. Massage therapy improves flexibility through stretching techniques, designed to ensure correct alignment and rehydration of muscle fibres following a work-out. Hydrated muscles have more elasticity, and a greater ability to stretch, thus improving flexibility.