

## Massage

Massage is perhaps one of the oldest healing traditions. Many cultures - including the Ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Chinese and Indians - were convinced of the therapeutic properties of massage and used it to treat a variety of ailments. The skin is the largest organ of the human body and is packed with nerve endings. Massage works by soothing soft tissue and encouraging relaxation. Massage is especially effective in treating 'vicious cycle' complaints. For instance, a tension headache is often self-sustaining because the pain makes the sufferer clench the affected muscles even harder. This, in turn, creates more pain. A thorough neck and shoulder massage can release muscle tension and break the pain cycle.

### A range of disorders

Modern studies have shown that massage can be used to successfully treat a variety of disorders, including:

- Anxiety
- Arthritis
- Back pain
- Chronic pain
- Constipation
- Depression
- Headache
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia.

### Deep relaxation

One of the immediate benefits of massage is a feeling of deep relaxation and calm. This occurs because massage prompts the release of endorphins, the brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) that produce feelings of wellbeing. Levels of stress hormones - such as adrenalin, cortisol and norepinephrine - are also reduced. Studies indicate that high levels of stress hormones impair the immune system.

Some of the physical benefits of massage include:

- Reduced muscle tension
- Improved circulation
- Stimulation of the lymphatic system
- Reduction of stress hormones
- Increased joint mobility and flexibility
- Improved skin tone
- Speedier healing of soft tissue injuries
- Heightened mental alertness
- Reduced anxiety and depression.

### Different types of massage

Typically, the practitioner uses either oil or talcum powder to allow their hands to slip over the subject's skin. Sometimes, a sheet or thin piece of cloth might be used for the same effect. The different types of massage may include:

- **Aromatherapy** - essential oils made from selected flowers and plants are added to the massage oil for their particular therapeutic properties; for example, the scent of sandalwood is thought to reduce nervous tension.
- **Baby massage** - can help to treat constipation, colic and sleeping problems. Studies have found that regular massage helps premature babies to gain weight at a faster rate.
- **Reflexology** - massage of the feet to encourage healing in other parts of the body.

- **Therapeutic** - also known as 'Western' or 'Swedish' massage. One of the most popular forms of massage in Australia, this technique is designed to promote relaxation and improve blood circulation.
- **Remedial** - to encourage healing of injured soft tissue - such as muscles, tendons and ligaments.
- **Shiatsu** - an oriental massage technique that aims to improve energy flow by working certain points on the body. The underlying principles of Shiatsu massage are similar to those of acupuncture.
- **Sports** - a blend of techniques that aims to enhance performance and help overworked muscles to recover quickly.

### Special considerations

There are some instances where massage isn't recommended, including:

- During pregnancy, especially the first trimester
- If skin rashes, cuts or infections are present
- If fractures or broken bones are suspected.

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Australian Association of Massage Therapist Tel. 1300 138 872 for free referral service

### Things to remember

- Studies have shown that massage is effective in treating a range of disorders.
- Massage improves circulation, reduces muscle tension and encourages a feeling of relaxation.
- There are many different types of massage to choose from.

### This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Association of Massage Therapists (AAMT)

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