

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.

Massage is the application of manual techniques to the soft tissue to mobilise them to maintain flexibility. Massage is especially effective in breaking compensatory pain postures and patterns. For example, a tension headache is often self-sustaining because the pain makes the person clench the affected muscles even harder, which, in turn, creates more pain. A thorough neck and shoulder massage can reduce muscle tension and break the pain cycle.

Massage for treatment of some disorders

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

- anxiety
- arthritis
- back or neck pain
- soft tissue injuries
- chronic pain
- constipation
- depression
- headache
- high blood pressure
- insomnia.

Benefits of massage

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 massage practitioner uses either oil or talcum powder to allow their hands to slip over the person'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 can 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** – encourages healing of injured soft tissue, such as muscles, tendons and ligaments.
- **Shiatsu** – is 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** – is a blend of techniques that aim 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 Therapists Tel. 1300 138 872

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)

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2015 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.

