

The article below is from *Today's Caregiver* and was actually written by a social worker, but she has some great information, especially for those not so familiar with massage. A link to the article can be found here: <https://caregiver.com/articles/value-massage-for-caregivers/>

TODAY'S CAREGIVER

The Value of Massage for Caregivers

by Kristine Dwyer, LSW, MS



Massage therapy isn't just a luxury anymore and has actually become a vital part of health care practices worldwide. It is a holistic therapy that has shown positive effects on physical and mental health in addition to enhancing medical treatments. Having a massage does more than just relax the body and mind. There are measurable physiological and psychological changes that occur; especially when massage is used as a preventative and continuous therapy. The effects of massage on the body's systems can be profound, directly impacting our immune system, digestion, respiration, circulation, nervous system, muscle health and more. It has been said that, "Massage is to the human body what a tune-up is for a car."

Experts estimate that 80-90 percent of disease is directly related to stress, therefore, massage is one way to combat the effects of stress and promote relaxation. In addition, massage can lower blood pressure, increase circulation, improve recovery from injury, help fight fatigue, promote more restful sleep and increase concentration. Pain relief can also be achieved by the stroking of the affected muscles to increase blood flow throughout the body. This in turn brings oxygen and nutrients to the muscles and helps eliminate acids and accumulated waste products. Other benefits include relief of mental stress, peace of mind, reduction of anxiety, and an increased capacity for calm thinking and creativity. The satisfaction of our need for caring and nurturing touch directly leads to a feeling of well-being.

Current research shows that more people are getting massages and as they become more mainstream, they are now appealing to all age groups. Recent national surveys have found that many physicians are encouraging patients to pursue massage as a treatment. In addition, the number of hospitals that offer massage therapy as a patient service has increased by more than one third over the past two years. Some employers have also found that offering massage therapy during break times actually increased staff alertness, motivation and productivity and reduced sick leave days.

Massage is suggested on nearly every caregiver self-help list, yet it seems that only a small percentage actually takes advantage of its benefits. Modesty, unfamiliarity or lack of information about the massage experience may prevent caregivers from participating in a valuable form of self-care and positive, healing touch. The following paragraphs provide caregivers with the information they will need to make an informed decision about massage.

Benefits and Results:

As a society, we are touch-deprived and this can lead to physical and emotional challenges. From birth to the end of life, caring touch is necessary to bring about a sense of well-being and security. Massage offers a drug-free, non-invasive approach that focuses on the body's natural ability to heal and regenerate itself.

Massage has also been used as a primary intervention for caregivers that experience stress, fatigue and insomnia. A study by the Oregon Hospice Association and College of Healing Arts found that when massage was offered as a respite intervention, 85 percent of the caregivers reported a decrease in emotional and physical stress, physical pain was relieved for 77 percent of the caregivers and difficult sleep was eased for over half of the participants. It is hoped that in the future, massage therapists can join hospice and medical treatment teams to assist caregivers and patients with sore muscles as well as offer them restfulness, compassion and peace of mind.

Massage Recommendations:

It is advisable for all persons interested in massage to consult first with their doctors to confirm that massage will be beneficial to them. There may be some conditions where massage is not recommended or specific techniques need to be limited. This may be especially true for some cancer patients or those who have varicose veins, skin inflammations, infections or tumors.

Locating a massage therapist can be done by word of mouth, through a physician or clinic or by contacting the [American Massage Therapy Association](#). They represent therapists around the country and require members to follow specific practices and a strict code of ethics. Massage therapy services should be provided by a professional who has received proper training in a variety of techniques, has graduated from an accredited or approved program and is certified, licensed or regulated by the state. Ultimately, having a sense of trust and comfort with the therapist will reflect on the outcome of the massage experience.

Basics of Massage:

Once the choice to have a massage has been made, it is important to discuss general health questions, concerns and massage methods with the therapist. This will help alleviate apprehension and maximize the massage experience. A massage session will take place in a warm, comfortable and quiet room on a special massage table. Soft, relaxing music is played and the aroma of healing oils or scents may be present.

Most massage techniques are performed with the client unclothed; however, each person may decide what clothing to wear for their own comfort. The therapist will leave the room to allow the client privacy while disrobing. Clients then cover themselves with a sheet or towel and are properly draped at all times to maintain warmth and privacy. Only the area of the body being worked on will be exposed. It is important to discuss with the therapist which parts of the body need to be massaged such as back, arms, legs, feet, hands, head, neck and shoulders. Private areas will not be touched. A scented oil or lotion may be used to hydrate the skin and allow for smooth strokes.

Massage techniques include: basic rubbing strokes to stimulate blood vessels, rocking movements and the application of pressure to specific muscle points for tension release. The average full-body massage lasts about an hour while a half-hour session allows time for a focus on specific areas such as the back, neck and shoulders or legs and feet.

Most people close their eyes, listen to the music and become completely relaxed throughout the session. The therapist may gently move the body and talk briefly about the massage techniques that are being used. Clients should immediately communicate any discomfort they may be experiencing so that another approach can be taken. Massage is the most beneficial when the body is not resistive to touch and the client feels at ease with the experience.

Once the massage is completed, many people feel a sense of freedom and calmness. After an initial period of feeling slowed down, people often have an increase in energy, focus and productivity, which can last for many days. The frequency of receiving massage therapy varies from weekly to monthly depending on the perceived benefits, physical and emotional results and cost factors.

Types of Massage:

There are a variety of massages and techniques offered today, although most therapists focus mainly on only one or two types. Some of the most common are:

- **Swedish Massage** - the most commonly practiced form of Western massage. It combines light stroking in one direction with deep pressure in another direction. This technique includes kneading, tapping, long strokes and circular pressure. It mainly loosens the muscles and eases aches and pains for the purpose of relaxation, rehabilitation and health support.
- **Deep Tissue Massage** - helpful for chronic aches and pains because the focus is on the inner muscles and connective tissues. This uses slower strokes and more direct pressure.

- **LaStone Massage** - a deeply relaxing treatment using smooth, warmed basalt stones and cooled marble stones.
- **Shiatsu** - an old oriental therapy that treats points along the acupuncture meridians and aims to release discomfort and rebalance energy.
- **Reiki** - a gentle but powerful Japanese energy healing technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes self-healing.
- **Trigger Point Massage** - applies direct finger pressure to painful, irritated areas of the muscle to release tensions and break cycles of spasms and pain.
- **Reflexology** - massage of the feet, hands or ears by pressing points to stimulate corresponding areas of the body that are linked to vital organs.
- **Rolfing** - a massage that focuses on the connective tissues.
- **Craniosacral Massage** - a light touch manipulation of the head and bottom of the spine that helps restore movement of the fluid in the spinal cord. This technique can be helpful in treating headaches, jaw problems, and back pain.

Cost of Massage:

Massage therapy ranges from \$40-\$100 per hour depending on the type of massage and the expertise of the therapist. Half-hour sessions are also offered at most massage clinics. In recent years, some insurance companies have added massage therapy to the list of covered medical procedures, especially if prescribed by a physician following a car accident or job-related injury. The best recommendation is to check with your insurance company for coverage prior to making an appointment. Choosing to invest in massage may be the best dollars caregivers spend to increase their capacity to provide care in the future. Family members can also support the caregiver by offering a gift of massage appointments.

Benefits for Caregivers:

Caregivers know the importance of caring for others yet sometimes they forget how important it is to care for themselves. A caregiver can become so focused on their role that they are unaware of what is happening to their own body and how stress is affecting them. Massage can be a wonderful way for caregivers to deal with the demands associated with caring for a loved one and it is especially important for replenishing the energy that is expended on helping others.

Studies have shown that when stress is not relieved, it can manifest itself into illness and disease. Setting aside time for massage on a regular basis can improve a caregiver's overall health status, increase energy, improve attitude and decrease stress. Many caregivers that have experienced a soothing massage have reported that they actually felt the tension melt away and felt reconnected to their own sense of self. Receiving a nurturing massage can remind caregivers what it means to be cared for and it upholds the value of what they give to others. Allowing themselves to be "cared for" now and then is valuable and necessary to their own survival. Opening up to positive touch and support reflects their own joy of giving and reminds them why they are steadfast in their role as a caregiver.

Massage restores a sense of wholeness for caregivers that may not have been felt for some time. It is a perfect potion for good health and it enhances a positive "mind-body-spirit" connection. By producing a meditative state, massage can provide emotional and spiritual balance and it allows for true relaxation and peace.