

Massage Could Ease Distress of Brain Cancer

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By Sarah Guy

The full study, “Pilot study of the impact of massage therapy on sources and levels of distress in brain tumour patients,” was published in

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By Stephen Thomas Keir and Julia R Saling

Massage therapy can significantly reduce distress levels in individuals with brain tumors, indicating its potential use to improve quality of life (QoL) in this population, report US researchers.

The study showed significant reductions in the National Comprehensive Cancer Network's Distress Thermometer (DT) after 4 weeks of twice-weekly massage therapy in a cohort of adult patients with malignant glioma.

Indeed, by the fourth week of massage therapy, none of the patients had a DT score indicative of distress, says the team.

"When used in combination with standard care, complementary therapies such as massage can significantly improve QoL in patients with late-stage disease," write Stephen Thomas Keir (Duke University, Durham, North Carolina) and Julia Saling (West Liberty University, Tridelfhia, West Virginia) in BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care.

Furthermore, they found that the number of distress-related concerns reported by the study participants (including worry and nervousness) directly correlated with distress levels, and that the number of concerns decreased throughout treatment from baseline until week 4 of the study.

The baseline survey revealed that at least three-quarters of the 25 participants, who were aged a median of 49 years, reported seven concerns: sadness (100%), worry (90%), fatigue (90%), nervousness (80%), pain (80%), sleep problems (80%), and getting around (80%). A further 50% of the cohort listed 10 additional concerns.

By 4 weeks, fatigue was the only concern to be reported by 50% or more patients; all other concerns had decreased below this frequency.

Interestingly, 1 week later, at the 5-week follow up to assess post-therapy distress levels, 50%

of participants reported an increase in concerns including worry, sadness, and pain, after the massage therapy ceased.

Alongside concerns, levels of distress dropped significantly over the study period, observe Keir et al, with significant mean score differences (out of a possible total score of 10.00) of 2.62 by week 3, 4.23 by week 4, and 3.40 by week 5 of the study. At week 4, all DT scores were under 4.00, which is the threshold for "distress" among brain tumor patients.

These findings suggest an additive or cumulative effect of massage therapy on distress reduction, write the authors.

"Recommendations for future studies include using a crossover methodology or a control group... [for] protocols over a longer period," suggest the researchers.