

Cancer Patients Feel Less Distress After Massage Therapy, Study Finds

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By Laurie Tarkan

**The full study, “Pilot study of the impact of massage therapy on sources and levels of distress in brain tumour patients,” was published in
BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care
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By Stephen Thomas Keir and Julia R Saling

The stress-relieving benefits of massage have been well documented, but a recent study shows that massage may have more profound benefits that just relieving stress and relaxing tight muscles.

The study, published in the journal BMJ, looked at the benefits of massage for brain cancer patients. To be expected, these patients often suffer from neurological problems, which affect their physical functioning, their cognitive abilities and their psychological well-being.

They also have to deal with the progressive nature of their illness and difficult treatments like radiation, surgery and chemotherapy. Brain cancer patients typically report a high prevalence of depression and other mental disorders.

In this study, 25 brain tumor patients who were classified as “distressed” received a massage twice a week for four weeks. At the end of week four, the distress scores for all participants were below the threshold for experiencing distress. In other words, the factors leading to their diagnosis faded away.

“This is more significant than I would have expected,” said Dr. Keri Peterson, a spokesperson for the American Massage Therapy Association.

What’s more, the issues these patients reported as “concerns” for them prior to the massage were no longer worrisome by the end of the four weeks. At the baseline assessment before the massages began, at least 75 percent of participants reported the following items of concern: sadness, worry, fatigue, nervousness, pain, sleep and getting around. At least 50 percent reported concerns with insurance, fears, depression, dry or itchy skin, work, transportation, eating, constipation, tingling in hands and feet, and nausea.

At the end of week four, only 50 percent of patients reported concerns with fatigue. All the other

sources of concern were felt by 40 percent or fewer of the participants. For example, while 100 percent of participants reported sadness at the onset of the study, only 40 percent reported sadness after four weeks of massage. The reduction in worries led to improved emotional, social and physical well-being.

However, when the massages were discontinued, the improvements began to fade, although they still scored better than before the study started.

Cancer patients have nearly twice the risk of developing psychiatric distress compared to the general population, and the benefits of massage may extend to those with other types of cancer as well.

Peterson said it's important to go to a licensed massage therapist. You can find one through AMTA's website. Be sure to tell the therapist what your goals are, Peterson added. A massage to relieve back pain is different than one that will reduce stress and improve one's well-being.

Read more: <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2013/02/14/cancer-patients-feel-less-distress-after-massage-therapy-study-finds/#ixzz2Vh4u1GkH>