

# **Massage Therapy May Help Relieve Symptoms of Depression, a New Review of Medical Literature Hints**

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**The full study, “Treatment effects of massage therapy in depressed people: a meta-analysis,” was published in Journal of Clinical Psychiatry  
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The authors of the review, however, acknowledge difficulties with research on the effects of massage, including the fact that it’s impossible to “blind” study participants or care providers to whether a person is receiving massage or a comparison treatment.

Nevertheless, they say there is “good evidence to suggest that massage therapy is an effective treatment of depression.”

Depression is a huge public health problem, and treatment is often inadequate, Dr. Wen-Hsuan Hou of I-Shou University in Kaohsiung, Taiwan and colleagues note in their report.

While massage can ease stress and tension and may have emotional benefits, the use of massage therapy in depressed patients is “controversial,” the investigators note, and “there is no qualitative review of the treatment effect of massage therapy in depressed patients.”

To investigate further, they searched for randomized controlled trials of massage therapy in depressed patients. They identified 17 studies including 786 people in all. In 13 of the trials, massage therapy was compared to another active treatment such as Chinese herbs, relaxation exercises, or rest, while four compared massage to a “no treatment” control group. Investigators also used a range of methods for evaluating mood and depression in study participants.

Overall, the studies, which were of “moderate” quality, showed that massage therapy had “potentially significant effects” in alleviating symptoms of depression, the researchers report in the American Journal of Psychiatry.

It’s not clear from the analysis, they emphasize, whether a person would need to undergo regular massage therapy for benefits to persist.

There are a number of ways through which massage could help people with depression, the researchers note, for example, by reducing stress and inducing relaxation; building an “alliance” between the therapist and patient; and by causing the body to release the “trust hormone” oxytocin.

“Further well-designed and longer follow-up studies, including accurate outcome measures, are needed,” they conclude.