Massage therapy for chronic pain

Clinical Guidelines Massage for Low Back Pain.


The 2016 review by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) found for chronic low back pain, effective therapies versus placebo, sham, no treatment, usual care, or wait list included massage therapy.


Clinical Guidelines Massage for Neck Pain
The National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) recommend acupuncture and massage therapy for knee osteoarthritis.


Additional Systematic Reviews with Meta-analysis
Sixty high quality and seven low quality studies were included in a systematic review with meta-analysis of massage therapy on pain and function across all pain populations. Results demonstrate massage therapy effectively treats pain compared to sham, no treatment, and active comparators. Compared to active comparators, massage therapy was also beneficial for treating anxiety and health-related quality of life.


A 2015 Cochrane review update of 25 trials (n=3096) found that for acute low back pain massage was better than inactive controls in the short term. For sub-acute and chronic LBP, massage was better than inactive controls for pain and function in the short term; when compared to active controls massage was better for pain both in the short term and long term follow-up. Still the authors express little confidence that massage is an effective treatment for LBP because the improvements were primarily in the short term.


Extremities including Knee OA
In a systematic review of 6 included trials (n=259) found soft tissue therapy for upper and lower extremities conditions effective for the management of plantar heel pain and lateral epicondylitis but not for subacromial impingement syndrome. Movement re-education (muscle energy technique) is effective for managing persistent lateral epicondylitis and localized relaxation massage may provide short term benefit for treating carpal tunnel syndrome when combined with multimodal care.


Massage therapy has been shown to be effective for knee osteoarthritis pain with benefits persisting for at least 8 weeks beyond treatment period with optimal dose found to be 60 minute sessions once per week for 8 weeks.


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