

Evidence Based Massage: Stress and Hypertension

How your local Massage Therapist fits into the primary care paradigm

The trend towards evidence-based models of healthcare has helped to highlight the benefits of preventive and wellness forms of complementary treatment such as Swedish Massage. Recent studies demonstrate that massage therapy can assist in the management of hypertension due to stress.

In one 2005 study, a team of researchers investigated the effect of relaxation massage on 16 healthy males.¹ Immediate post-treatment effects included a drop in systolic blood pressure. After six weeks of twice-weekly massage, the diastolic blood pressure was reduced by 11% with an immediate post-treatment net decrease of 22%.

In a U.S. study, 30 adults with at least a 6-month medical diagnosis of hypertension were randomly assigned into either a massage group or a progressive muscle relaxation group. The massage group received a standardised, Swedish massage twice weekly for 5 weeks. This group recorded a sitting diastolic and systolic blood pressure decrease after the first and last sessions. Reclining diastolic blood pressure declined from the first to the last day of the 5-week treatment period.² Both groups reported less anxiety and depression on two psychometric measures (STAI and CES-D) but salivary and urinary stress hormones decreased only for the massage therapy group.

A preliminary study from the University of South Florida tested the effects of a regularly applied back massage on the blood pressure of patients with clinically diagnosed hypertension. Subjects received a series of ten, 10-minute back massages three times a week while a control group relaxed in the same environment over ten sessions.

Analysis of variance determined that systolic and diastolic blood pressure changed significantly between groups over time.³ Effect size was 2.25 for systolic pressure and 1.56 for diastolic pressure, suggesting that regular massage may lower blood pressure in hypertensive persons.

In yet another study, 54 adults (60+) were randomly selected for two treatment groups. The objective was to assess the effects of massage therapy compared with guided relaxation on stress perception and wellbeing among older adults. Results showed significant improvements in the anxiety, depression, vitality, general health, perceived stress and positive well-being subscales of the General Wellbeing Schedule among the massage participants.⁴

This evidence underscores the key role that your local Massage Therapist can play as part of a multidisciplinary care team involved in the management of hypertension and stress.

¹ M. Aourella, M. Skooga, J. Carleson, "Effects of Swedish massage on blood pressure", **Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice** (2005) 11, 242-246

² M. Hernandez-Reif, T. Field, J. Krasnegor, H. Theakston, Z. Hossain, I. Burman, "High blood pressure and associated symptoms were reduced by massage therapy", **Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies** (2000) 4(1), 31-38

³ C. Olney, "The effect of therapeutic back massage in hypertensive persons: a preliminary study", **Biological Research for Nursing**, 2005 Oct;7(2), 98-105

⁴ P. Sharpe, H. Williams, M. Granner, J. Hussey, "A randomised study of the effects of massage therapy compared to guided relaxation on well-being and stress perception among older adults", **Complementary Therapies in Medicine** (2007), doi:10.1016/j.jctim.2007.01.004

Association of
Massage Therapists Ltd

Street address:
Suite 3.02
22-36 Mountain Street
Ultimo NSW 2007

Postal address:
PO Box 826
Broadway NSW 2007

Ph: 02 9211 2441
Fax: 02 9211 2281

Email:
info@amt.org.au

Web:
www.amt.org.au

Office hours:
Monday - Friday
9.30am - 4.00pm



in good hands

ABN 32 001 859 285
Established 1966

Your local AMT-accredited therapist is:

