

## **THERAPEUTIC MASSAGE**

Massage therapy can be traced back in history to ancient times where it was reputed for its medicinal benefits. Some of the earliest writings are found in China from the 'Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine' Circa 2000BC, through the ancient Greeks and Roman civilisation to Per Henrik Ling (1776-1839) in Sweden via the First World War in France to UK beauty salons in the 1950's. It is believed, however, that Dutchman Johan Georg Mezger (1838-1909) originally documented the strokes and techniques as we apply them today.

In its more recent history massage became a pampering, stress relieving treatment. During modern times it is undergoing a further renaissance and is now commonplace at events from the amateur weekend park runs to the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## **BENEFITS**

Therapeutic Massage or Soft Tissue Therapy is defined by the Sports Massage Association as "the management, manipulation and rehabilitation of soft tissues of the body including muscles, tendons and ligaments". It has developed into a mainstream therapy and the hands on approach offers the benefits of touch as well the empathy of the therapeutic relationship. Psychologically and emotionally massage can be helpful for anxiety and stress but what else can it do?

Massage aims to:

- Induce relaxation
- Aid lymphatic flow
- Sedate or stimulate nerve endings
- Reduce muscle spasm
- Aid removal of fatigue
- Increase blood flow

## **EVIDENCE**

Scientific research into the benefits of massage is limited but generally encouraging. Studies are usually small but current evidence suggests that massage can be beneficial to assist in improving circulation (mostly local stimulation), removing fatigue and lowering pain sensitivity\*. In 2009 the government advisory body NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) recommended "soft tissue techniques such as massage" for the management of chronic low back pain. It has the advantage of being economically viable for the NHS or patient and the benefit of having no side effects when correctly administered.

The body of evidence although mainly anecdotal is building and generally positive showing therapeutic massage as a safe and effective treatment for soft tissue pain and injury. It is, however, of great importance to choose the correct therapy and the right therapist.

## **TYPES OF MASSAGE**

**Swedish** or **Holistic Massage** is a relaxing form of massage that all therapists begin to learn but they can develop these techniques to improve their abilities and offer even more effective treatment options. This form of massage is relaxing for the mind and the superficial soft

tissue but if your tension is deep rooted you need a deep tissue massage. **Deep tissue massage** is not just about applying more pressure but about applying the pressure in a controlled way to release tense muscles and must be performed with client feedback to ensure treatment is comfortable and therefore efficacious throughout. Treatment can feel tender but should also feel good as tight muscles are coaxed into relaxation rather than being painfully pummelled into submission risking damage to the delicate underlying tissues. **Sports massage** is a form of deep tissue massage where the therapist will have added knowledge of Anatomy and Physiology, the athlete, their training and recovery. The sports massage therapist can work as part of the training team to help the amateur or professional athlete achieve optimum performance. It can be a painful experience for the elite athlete but they have specific goals and needs that require quick recovery times especially during competition. It is therefore of great importance to see a therapist you trust and works with you to gain the greatest advantage without causing unnecessary pain. Massage is not and should not be something unpleasant, even the tender areas should feel they are benefitting from the touch. It is when all is said and done 'Therapeutic Massage' and the very word therapeutic is by definition "contributing to well-being".

## **WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A THERAPIST**

It is important to find a therapist who is qualified and insured to offer you a therapeutic treatment. Most professional therapists will belong to a voluntary Governing body and can be easily found via an internet search. Once you make contact the therapist will be happy to discuss your requirements and provide details of qualifications and experience as well as an indication of what you can expect from your treatment.

Most therapists these days have a website where you can view their experience, see client recommendations and find how they continue to study or train to offer the latest and best in massage therapy.

A good therapist will have a wide range of experience in therapies and techniques and will have trained in a number of therapies to bring a multidisciplinary approach to your treatment.

Therapeutic massage is not a panacea for all ailments but it is a valuable and effective therapy for soft tissue injury, pain and tension and is earning its place in a positive lifestyle within the healthcare field. As a therapist for over 20 years I have seen massage help people with chronic pain, stress related conditions, soft tissue injury and tension as well as those wishing to achieve optimum performance in amateur and professional sport and dance.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

I set up the Therapeutic Massage Clinic in Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne in 2000 to bring a much needed all round approach to therapy. I have continued to train adding to my 'tool kit' of therapeutic techniques and contacts. For the past twenty years I have indulged my passion for bodywork therapies training with physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, sports coaches and medical practitioners. Through continual study and development I bring a whole body approach to the client to encourage well being and positive health.

I trained as a beauty therapist in 1993 igniting a passion for massage therapy which led me to become the first UK therapist to be qualified to Level 5 standard. I have worked with professional and amateur sports people and covered events such as PGA tournaments, the Great North Run, the 2012 Paralympic Games and the 2014 Commonwealth Games. I continue to work with elite athletes at the English Institute of Sport based at Gateshead International Stadium.

Aside from studying bodywork therapies and running clinics I have been a trainer in industry since 1999 and qualified as a lecturer at Northumbria University in 2003. I have worked with Aston Hotels, Gateshead Academy, International Therapy Examination Council (ITEC), St Oswald's Hospice, Ohashiatsu UK and Sunderland University among others.

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### **References**

[www.thesma.org](http://www.thesma.org)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

Studies at [www.PubMed](http://www.PubMed)

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