

massage & well-being



Stress is an inevitable part of life.

No matter how organized your schedule, laid-back your attitude or carefree your lifestyle, very few people escape stress. And, the more we learn about the physical effects of stress, the more we begin to understand how important it is to find ways to deal with stress.

From meditation to regular exercise, people have found a wide variety of ways to combat stress and stay healthy. Now, some research is beginning to piece together the benefits massage therapy can add to your health and wellness program.

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Power of Touch >

In a 2010 study, scientists at Cedars-Sinai investigated the physical effects of massage therapy, finding that the 29 subjects who received 45 minutes of Swedish massage had an immune boosting response when compared to the 24 participants who received 45 minutes of light touch. Hormones and blood cells were measured before and after the massage, and at regular intervals up to one hour after the massage was done.

“This research indicates that massage doesn’t only feel good, it also may be good for you,” explains Dr. Mark Rapaport, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences and lead author, in a report in the *Los Angeles Times*. “People often seek out massage as part of a healthy lifestyle, but there hasn’t been much physiological proof of the body’s heightened immune response following massage until now.”

The blood tests of participants who experienced Swedish massage showed changes indicating a benefit to the immune system, including a sizeable decrease in arginine vasopressin, a hormone that contributes to aggressive behavior. Scientists also noted a small decrease in the stress hormone cortisol. Interestingly, lymphocytes—cells that help the immune system defend the body from disease—also increased in the Swedish massage participants.

Of important note is that these results were seen after a *single* massage. So, consider making massage therapy a regular part of your health and wellness regimen.

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Talking to Your Doctor >

Unlike in the past, more and more physicians are beginning to explore the benefits that massage therapy can offer their patients. Also, more and more patients are beginning to proactively take the reigns of their own health care outcomes, investigating and asking about complementary therapies on their own.

According to the results of a recent survey conducted by the American Hospital Association’s Health Forum and Samueli Institute, a nonprofit research organization, 40 percent of hospitals indicated they offer one or more alternative therapies—up a full 37 percent from 2007.

“Today’s patients have better access to health information and are demanding more personalized care,” says Sita Ananth, study author and director of knowledge services for the Samueli Institute. “The survey results reinforce the fact that patients want the best that both conventional and alternative medicine can offer, and hospitals are responding.”

Of the hospitals that responded to the survey, 64 percent reported using massage therapy as part of outpatient care, and 44 percent use massage therapy as part of inpatient care.