

Back Pain and Massage

How Bodywork Can Help

Karrie Osborn

Whether it's a pulled muscle from yoga class or an afternoon basketball game, or a long-term pain caused by injury, most of us will come to know the beast that is called back pain. In fact, when it comes to low-back pain specifically, researchers say that 70-85 percent of the population will experience it at some point in their lives.

Causes of Pain

Experts say the cause of back pain can be the result of several factors. High on the list is stress. When our body is stressed, we literally begin to pull inward: the shoulders roll forward and move up to the ears, the neck disappears, and the back tightens in the new posture. "It's an

ergonomics, lack of exercise, arthritis, osteoporosis, a sedentary lifestyle, overexertion, pregnancy, kidney stones, fibromyalgia, excess weight, and more can contribute to pain.

Geoffrey Bishop, owner of Stay Tuned Therapeutics in Flagstaff, Arizona, says mechanics is the main cause of back pain that he sees in his practice. "It's mechanics, including repetitive use and ignorance about preventative postures, and neglect by employers and employees to provide rest and recovery." The past also plays a part, he says. "Old injuries and traumatic events, left untreated and unresolved, seem to dictate where stress lands in the back as well."



Studies show that massage therapy helps reduce back pain more than some medications.

armoring effect," says Angie Parris-Raney, a Denver-based massage therapist who specializes in deep-tissue massage and sports therapy. "That protective mode, with the muscles in flex, can even result in visceral problems," she says, where the pain also affects internal organs.

In addition to stress, poor posture, bad

Massage Offers Hope

Those who suffer with back pain know there are no easy answers for chasing the pain away. Physical therapy has proven effective for some sufferers, as has chiropractic and acupuncture, but massage therapy is also making a name

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*Tension is who
you think you
should be.
Relaxation is
who you are.*

Chinese Proverb

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for itself when it comes to providing relief. In fact, research has shown that massage can be a great friend to the back-pain sufferer.

"Massage therapists have long treated low-back pain safely and effectively," says Les Sweeney, president of Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals. "They have done so less expensively and less invasively than is possible with other treatments."

In fact, a study by the Group Health Research Institute in Seattle found that massage was more effective at treating low-back pain than medication. Patients who received massage once a week for 10 weeks were more likely to report that their back pain had improved, and improvements were still present six months after the study. Other research from the University of Miami School of Medicine and the Touch Research Institute showed that massage can decrease stress and long-term pain, improve sleep and range of motion, and help lower the incidence of depression and anxiety that often accompanies back pain.

For Parris-Raney's clients, the length of pain relief provided by massage therapy varies depending on the condition they are experiencing. Getting on a regular massage schedule, however, has really helped her clients manage the back pain, she says. When they go past their normally scheduled appointment, "their bodies know it's time to get a massage again." Whether it's just helping clients get through the day, or reminding the stressed-out office worker to breathe, Parris-Raney says massage can play an important part in back pain relief.

Whitney Lowe, owner of Oregon's Orthopedic Massage Education and Research Institute, says the benefits of massage for back pain depend on the primary cause of the pain. "If it is predominantly muscular pain, then massage has a great deal to offer in reducing pain associated with chronic muscle tightness, spasms, myofascial trigger points, or those types of problems. If it's something caused by a joint alignment problem or compression on a nerve, for example, then the role of massage might be somewhat different, such as helping to address the biomechanical dysfunctions,

but not really being able to get pressure off the nerve itself."

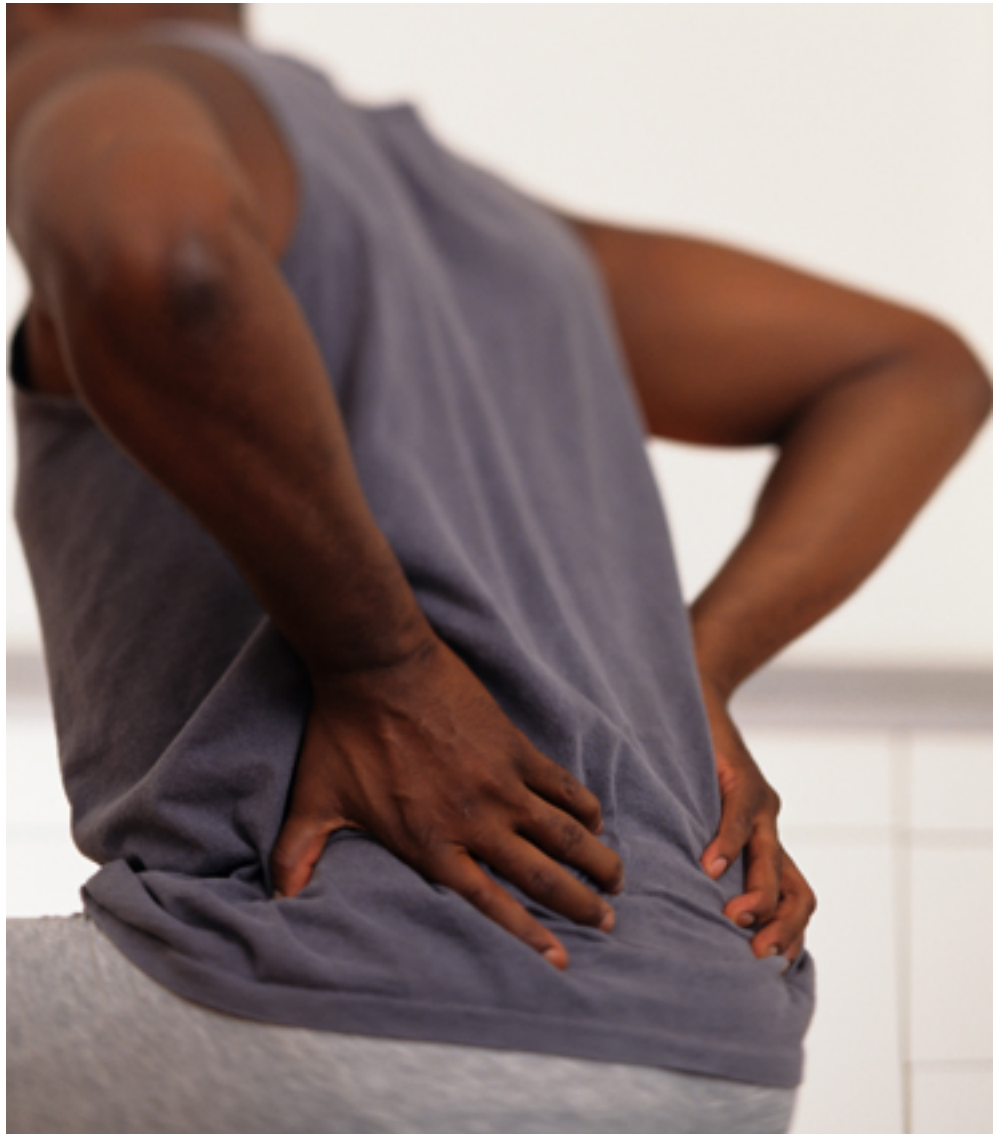
Massage Works

When it comes to back pain, there are a lot of options out there. Ultimately, massage, and its myriad benefits, might be a viable answer. For back pain sufferers, Parris-Raney says massage can work wonders. "Massage can help relax the body, relax the psyche, and improve a client's range of motion and circulation to the affected tissues," she says. Not only can massage help directly with the pain, but it can also make life a little easier, too. "Massage lets you tap into the parasympathetic system," she says, "and tap into all the good hormones that help you sleep better and help you handle stressors along the way." All of that helps in building a healthier back and a happier you.

Benefits of Massage

From stress relief to skin rejuvenation, the benefits of massage are extensive. When it comes to managing back pain, however, there are some specific benefits touch therapy can offer:

- Improved circulation. With increased circulation comes faster recovery time for sore, overworked muscle tissues.
- Increased release of endorphins. The prevalence of these natural painkillers is boosted every time you have a massage. This can only help in managing pain.
- Improved movement. Range of motion and flexibility both get a boost with massage.
- Increased relaxation. When you relax, your muscles relax, thereby calming the pain.



Be sure to communicate with your massage therapist if you are experiencing back pain.

Healthy Energy Boosters

Tips to Staying Energized and Alert

Rebecca Jones

Here are some tips for keeping your energy levels up.

Snack Smart

Strategic snacking can be a good way to smooth out dips in your energy level and avoid hunger cravings that can lead you to overeat. Go ahead and snack---just be as choosy in your snack selection as you are in meal planning.

Grab an Energy Bar

Don't fall for the fiction that all so-called "energy bars" are unpalatable but good for you. A lot of energy bars are filled with chemicals and with sugar, so read labels, and look for high fiber, high protein, and limited carbs.

Pick-Me-Up Snacks

Nuts such as almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, and hazelnuts are among the best choices for healthy, pick-me-up snacks, nutritionists say.

Stay Hydrated

Even slight dehydration can leave you tired and lethargic. The answer is, of

course, to drink plenty of water. If the taste of plain water doesn't excite you, consider some of the flavored varieties, keeping in mind that loads of extra sugar should be avoided.

Get Your Beauty Sleep

The number one myth about sleep is that you can get by on six hours a night, but the further away you deviate from getting eight hours sleep a night---and some people get too much, not too little---the greater the risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, obesity, and a host of other maladies.

Avoid Caffeine, Get to Sleep

Caffeine is a great pick-me-up first thing in the morning, but it has a six- to seven-hour "half-life," meaning that half the caffeine in that cup of coffee you consumed to ward off the 3:00 p.m. doldrums will still be lingering in your bloodstream after the 10:00 p.m. news.

Rebecca Jones is a Denver-based freelance writer.



Stay hydrated to keep energy up.

Massage for Old Injuries

Ancient Injuries Don't Have to Make You Feel Old

Art Riggs

Injuries such as chronic back pain, trick knees, and sticky shoulders are not necessarily something you just have to live with. Massage techniques might hold the key to unlocking this old pain.

Will Massage Help?

The benefits of massage will depend on the extent of the injury, how long ago it occurred, and on the skill of the therapist. Chronic and old injuries often require deeper and more precise treatments with less emphasis on general relaxation and working on the whole body. Massage works best for soft tissue injuries to muscles and tendons and is most effective in releasing adhesions and lengthening muscles that have shortened due to compensatory reactions to the injury. Tight and fibrous muscles not

only hurt at the muscle or its tendon, but can also interfere with proper joint movement and cause pain far away from the original injury.

Therapists who perform such work often have specialized names for their work---such as orthopedic massage, neuromuscular therapy, myofascial release, medical massage, etc.,---but many massage therapists utilize an eclectic approach combining the best of the specialties.

It Works!

A recent Consumer Reports article ran the results of a survey of thousands of its readers and reported that massage was equal to chiropractic care in many areas, including back and neck pain. Massage

also ranked significantly higher than some other forms of treatment, such as physical therapy or drugs.

If that nagging injury persists, consider booking a massage. Be sure to discuss the injury with your practitioner: How did you receive the injury? Have you reinjured it? And what exactly are your symptoms? Often, the body compensates in one area to protect another that has been traumatized, and this can create new problems.

Discuss the issues with your massage therapist. (Sometimes just talking about old injuries can play a significant role in the healing process.) Together, the two of you can work to determine a treatment plan.

Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths.

Etty Hillesum

Happy New Year!

I am offering 2 new wellness packages to help you attain both mental and physical health in 2012!

Option 1: \$160

2-60 minute massage sessions with foot soaks and sea salt scrubs, 7-Day Body Cleansing Kit (detoxifies the system and promotes gastrointestinal health), Herbal Detox Tea (20 teabags). Retail Value \$214

Option 2: \$350

3-60 minute massage sessions with foot soaks and sea salt scrubs, 30-Day Feeling Fit Kit (includes: Vanilla & Chocolate Protein Shake mixes, Citrus & Pomegranate Energy Fizz Tabs, Chocolate Fit Chews, 40 Herbal Detox Teabags, Daily Fiber Boost, Feeling Fit Guide and Meal Planner), 7-Day Body Cleansing Kit. Retail Value \$565

Customized packages are available upon request and specific needs.

THANK YOU for your continued loyalty. Best Wishes for 2012!

Jen

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