Massage and arthritis

ARTHRITIS INFORMATION SHEET

This sheet has been written to provide general information about massage for people with arthritis and musculoskeletal pain. It includes guidelines as to how to find a qualified massage therapist and general safety tips. It also tells you where to find further information and advice.

What is massage?

Massage involves the mobilisation of tissues, using pressure, tension, motion or vibration. It targets the soft tissues of the body, such as muscles, tendons and ligaments. Massage can be done manually, using hands, fingers, elbows, or with mechanical aids.

What are the benefits for arthritis?

In general, it is claimed massage can help:

- decrease stress hormones and depression
- ease muscle tension
- improve circulation and reduce swelling
- increase the body's production of natural pain-killing endorphins, and
- improve sleep.

There have been limited scientific studies on the benefits of massage specifically for arthritis. From these studies, it appears that massage may have short term pain-relieving benefits for people with arthritis-related pain. Massage may also help to temporarily improve the mobility of joints and muscles affected by arthritis. However massage will not reduce inflammation or joint damage from arthritis.

Are there different types of massage?

Massage therapy generally falls into two categories:

- relaxation – typically, this type of massage focuses on stress release and reducing general muscle tension
- remedial or therapeutic massage – this type of massage aims to address injuries and chronic muscular pain, such as that caused by arthritis. Remedial treatments target specific problem areas and are more likely to be beneficial in temporarily relieving the symptoms of arthritis, such as pain.

Are there any risks or safety precautions?

Always discuss any new treatments you are thinking about trying with your rheumatologist (arthritis specialist) or doctor to find out if there are specific things you should avoid. As people with arthritis are likely to have joint and soft tissue pain and damage, it is important to check the qualifications and experience of the therapist providing the massage. Massage therapy may not be appropriate when joints are acutely inflamed; check with your rheumatologist or doctor.

Choosing a qualified massage therapist

Massage therapists may have different levels of training depending on the type of massage they practice. To be assured that your therapist has formal, accredited qualifications and adheres to a code of ethics, check that they are a member of Massage & Myotherapy Australia or equivalent organisation.When choosing a massage therapist, check that they are also experienced with working with arthritis.

There are two main types of massage therapists in Australia: massage therapists and remedial massage therapists. Remedial massage therapists hold additional educational qualifications and may be able to provide health fund rebates from private health funds (although a qualified massage therapist may also be able to provide some health fund rebates).

Working with your massage therapist

When attending a massage therapy session, be sure to discuss your needs with the therapist and ask them what treatment is best suited to your condition.Massage therapy should be conducted in a secure and private area where you have the ability to undress and dress in private. The therapist should not be present at this stage and you will be asked to lie on the table andcover yourself with the

appropriate towel or cover. It is normal practice for undergarments to be worn. During the massage, towels or coverings should be used to cover any part of the body not directly receiving treatment.

If you are uncomfortable or unsure at any stage of the massage, be sure to tell the therapist. You have the right to ask the therapist to stop any treatment immediately and decide whether you want to continue with the massage.

Remember, if you experience any discomfort during your treatment, let your massage therapist know. Your massage therapist should also inform you of any effects you might notice following the treatment, such as mild pain, headache or tenderness as this can be a normal post-treatment outcome.

What you need to tell your massage therapist prior to your treatment:

It is important that your massage therapist is aware of your diagnosed condition, as there are many forms of arthritis, each with their own treatment needs and precautions. You should advise them of your medical treatments and other medical conditions, including medications.

It is also important that you sign an informed consent form. The massage therapist should explain what treatment they will apply, once they have all the information you have provided them and that is relevant to your condition and health history. If you do not fully understand you have the right to ask for a further explanation. If you agree to the treatment plan, sign and date the form. This is a process that should happen at every massage session and each form will be filed along with your health record in a secure filing cabinet.

In follow-up consultations, be sure to update your therapist about the effects of the previous treatment and of any changes to your condition, including medications.

Does my health fund cover massage therapy?

Many health funds provide rebates for remedial massage therapy treatments in Australia if performed by members of Massage & Myotherapy Australia or equivalent organisation. To ensure you are covered, contact your health fund and check with your therapist when making your appointment.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ARTHRITIS OFFICE FOR MORE INFORMATION SHEETS ON ARTHRITIS.

Massage will not cure your arthritis but may provide short-term pain relief, improve flexibility and reduce muscle tension. Make sure you choose a qualified massage therapist.

MASSAGE & MYOTHERAPY AUSTRALIA

This information sheet was produced in association with Massage & Myotherapy Australia.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Websites:

To find a qualified Massage & Myotherapy Australia registered massage therapist in your area visit www.massagemyotherapy.com.au or call 1300 138 872.

Booklets:

Arthritis Australia's *Taking control of your Pain in Arthritis* booklet provides information and practical tips for managing pain. To get a copy, visit: www.arthritisaustralia.com.au or by calling 1800 011 041.

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