

Massage for Musculoskeletal Pain and Disorders

The term 'musculoskeletal disorders' covers a broad range of disorders which affect joints and soft tissues, such as muscles, ligaments, tendons and nerves. Common symptoms which may be experienced alongside a musculoskeletal disorder are pain, stiffness and limited range of motion. Musculoskeletal disorders have a range of causes, some of them being age, occupation, activity level and lifestyle. Other causes associated with musculoskeletal disorders involve the wear and tear (overuse) of daily activities and direct traumas (acute) to the area through jerking movements, direct impact and falls.

Musculoskeletal pain is a common problem that can be difficult to treat, often causing long-term problems and even disability. An acute injury can turn into a chronic problem because of delayed healing, inadequate treatment or complications that develop from the original injury. Musculoskeletal pain includes chronic pain syndromes such as recurrent headache, fibromyalgia and nerve disorders.

Pain doesn't have to be the only symptom, nerve symptoms can also include burning, tingling or numbness. Other symptoms that can develop include depression, anxiety and stress. This can be due to the problem affecting your work, family or social life. Pain itself can be depressing and cause anxiety, not to mention its impact on sleep deprivation which in turn causes more stress and depression.



Massage therapy is an effective tool in the and management of physiological and psychological symptoms associated with musculoskeletal disorders. Massage can produce a number of benefits which can enable the individual to improve performance and functioning, such as a decrease in pain and an improvement in range of motion and tissue flexibility. It not only addressing the problem of pain directly by reducing it, but also induces relaxation which will relieve stress and anxiety associated with the problem. Massage can improve your overall health, mental energy and give a more positive outlook.

HOW CAN MASSAGE HELP MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS?

Massage therapy can be given to an individual with a musculoskeletal disorder to help in a number of ways.

1 Reduce Pain

Massage increases muscle flexibility and reduces tension which could be creating pain. A massage will also increase serotonin production (happy hormones) thereby reducing stress levels and decreasing pain. Massage triggers the release of natural pain killers like dopamine. The physical touch and pressure of massage also interferes with pain signal transmission, and reduces its' ability to reach the brain. Massage promotes healing by increasing blood flow to the area bringing with it oxygen and nutrients. Muscle spasm, pain and swelling can be reduced through massage improving the symptoms you may be experiencing that are adding to your stress. Stress is associated with pain; anxiety about an illness or injury; concern about how it may be impacting on you personally, professionally and financially. Cortisol, a stress hormone is released in response to pain, further increasing your stressful experience of pain. The more pain increases, the more stress increases which will in turn keeps increasing the pain levels. eased.



2 Aid Relaxation

Relaxation can be increased when stress

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is reduced. When stress levels are high both physically and mentally, relaxation is prevented. Muscles become tense and painful, and headaches compound your stress and frustration. A massage aims to relieve muscle tension. Friction is created between the skin and fingers during a massage, encouraging blood flow to increase. Increasing blood flow results in muscle temperature rising. Tissue elasticity increases releasing tension in the muscles. Relaxation of muscles allows increase in movement and a decrease in pain. Massage is also proven to reduce blood pressure, and heart rate which will allow your body de-stress and reduce the symptoms you may be feeling of stress and anxiety.

Cortisol is a stress related hormone released when the brain detects a threat. Low levels of cortisol can enable the individual to feel alert, observant and aware. However, prolonged periods of high cortisol levels (often the case when dealing with chronic pain) can lead the individual to feel anxious, stressed and depressed. Massage can promote relaxation, by increasing the release of endorphins and serotonin (happy hormones) and enable you to feel calm, therefore reducing the release of cortisol.

3 Improve Flexibility and Movement
The friction and manipulation of muscles and soft tissues during massage stimulates blood flow to the area. The increase in circulation and warmth increases tissue flexibility and can release tight structures and improve movement. The application of massage can help to reduce muscle tension, fascia tension and scar tissue all of which can assist in improved muscle flexibility and injury prevention. The manual stretching of muscles, elongating them during a massage can improve joint movement.

4 Release Trigger Points
A trigger point is a tight 'knot' within the muscle where congestion has created a hypersensitive area that can refer pain to neighbouring areas, and create headaches. A therapist can use their fingers or thumbs with firm pressure creating an ischemic reaction. Pain may be felt during this time but eases over a few seconds. When the pressure is released blood rushed to the area, causing muscle relaxation.

5 Reduce Scar Tissue
Massage therapy can be extremely beneficial following a surgical procedure. When surgery is performed an accumulation of scar tissue will be formed in the surrounding areas due to the distress caused. The formation of scar tissue is unavoidable as it is part of the healing process, if left untreated though, scar tissue can become excessive, adhesive and limit the performance and flexibility of muscles or joints. A range of massage techniques which vary in stroke depth, direction and rhythm can achieve a number of benefits. The benefits of massage post-surgery include a reduction in swelling, increased healing and reduced scar tissue.

6 Promote Healing
Massage can produce an increase in cellular exchange by increasing the blood flow to the affected area. Cellular exchange refers to the process of delivering essential nutrients such as oxygen and removing waste products from tissues. An increase in cellular exchange can help facilitate healing, maximise performance and maintain healthy muscles.



7 Breakdown or Realign Collagen Fibres
When an injury occurs the body lays down collagen fibres in a disorganised fashion. Disorganised collagen fibres can lead the tissue to become painful, tight, and a reduction in range of movement may be observed. Massage can breakdown the adhesive fibre connections and realign collagen fibres into a more functional orientation.

Massage can benefit you if you are suffering from a musculoskeletal disorder. Situations where massage would be extremely beneficial include chronic pain, as part of a rehabilitation programme, post-surgery, relieving stress and tight/ painful muscles. The benefits of massage include a decrease in pain, increased range of motion, relaxation, improved flexibility and promotes healing. Emotionally, massage can stimulate the release of 'happy hormones' which will help you to sleep better, and possibly help you better cope with your condition on a daily basis. For optimal effect massage should not be a one off thing, a course of treatments or regular massage will help you achieve the best results.



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