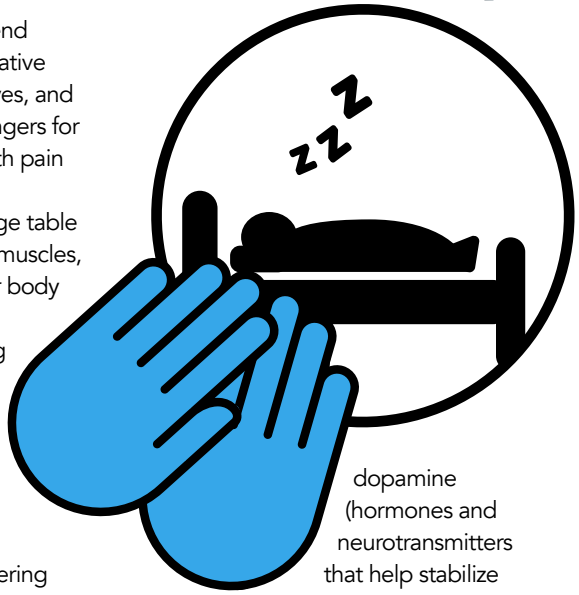
Massage for Better Sleep

Everyone will require different amounts of sleep in order to function appropriately, on average though most adults should aim for 7–9 hours to thrive successfully. The reality is that many people are not reaching their hourly sleep goals necessary to be productive and healthy. It's also not just about the quantity of sleep but also the quality. Disturbed, interrupted sleep with a lack of deep, REM (rapid eye movement) sleep will result in you waking unrefreshed, frustrated, even anxious.

A lack of sleep can affect your health, lowering your immune system capacity, slowing your reaction time, and reducing your ability to perform at work, in the home or at sport. Obesity, higher risk of long-term disease and substance abuse are all linked to inadequate sleep. Chronic insomnia causes extreme fatigue and problems with concentration, and can adversely affect your mood, wellbeing and relationships. Overcoming insomnia is critical for fostering overall health and wellness. Nutrition and exercise are often advocated as the basis for good health, but research has shown that good quality sleep is a vital part of any holistic treatment. 'Sleep-debt' accrued during the week can not be reversed by playing catch-up on the weekends!

Instead of lying in bed each night watching the minutes tick by, there are ways that you can help your body fall asleep. One of these is through massage. Massage is too often 'classed' as pampering, when there are real health benefits to be derived from it. Massage has been shown to improve sleep in infants, children, adults and the elderly alike, as well as individuals with psychiatric disorders, fibromyalgia, cancer, heart disease, lower back pain, pain, cerebral palsy and breast disease. Massage helps people spend more time in deep sleep, the restorative stage in which the body barely moves, and neurotransmitters (chemical messengers for your nervous system) associated with pain are reduced.



When you are lying on a massage table and someone is manipulating your muscles, two things happen that trigger your body to relax. Firstly, you are physically unable to be running around, taking phone calls, returning emails or messages, checking social media – your entire nervous system can relax and slow down with reduced external stimulation. Secondly, physical responses within your body induce relaxation by lowering blood pressure and heart rate, increasing serotonin (a happy hormone), and reducing pain and stress through a cascade of neurophysiological pathways brought on by touch, pressure and warmth in the muscle tissues.

Massage may improve sleep through 3 main ways.

1. **Massage reduces stress.**
   As suggested during a massage you are 'forced' to dedicate that time to 'switching off.' Massage causes cortisol (a stress hormone) levels to drop, and increases the secretion of serotonin and dopamine (hormones and neurotransmitters that help stabilize your mood). Serotonin is a feel-good hormone that increases positivity and relaxation, as well as helping you feel generally more energized. This energy is particularly important because we all need it to get us going in the morning and wash away the lethargy that would otherwise keep us in bed. Using massage to decrease stress and promote relaxation may help you sleep better.
2. **Production of melatonin.**
   Melatonin plays an important role in regulating your circadian rhythm – your body clock – and this rhythm controls aspects of our body's hormone release, temperature and sleeping pattern. Melatonin winds the body down to a more lethargic and sleep-ready state. Although not directly influenced by massage, melatonin is dependent on its serotonin precursor (a substance from which another substance is formed). Research has shown that regular massage resulted in increased levels of serotonin (and thus potentially increased levels of melatonin) and subjects reported improved sleep. Without melatonin, it would be impossible to achieve relaxed, restful sleep and so the body would not be able to go through



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the restorative processes that typically takes place in bed.

3. **Managing pain and tension**. Pain and sleep loss can exacerbate each other; leading to a vicious cycle. A lack of sleep can make pain seem worse; while pain itself can directly impact your ability to fall asleep or find a comfortable position. Successfully treating the pain can help improve sleep, and massage may be a treatment option for you. Massage can release tight muscles and trigger points, as well as promote circulation to an area that will facilitate healing and reduce pain. Its also important to consider advice from a therapist regarding sleep positions, mattress, pillows and additional therapy that may help reduce your pain and improve sleep.



Massage can be beneficial for insomnia-related stress, as well as insomnia related to other conditions including:

- anxiety
- digestive disorders
- fibromyalgia
- headaches
- myofascial pain syndrome
- paraesthesia and nerve pain
- soft tissue strains and injuries
- temporomandibular joint pain
- cancer
- restless leg syndrome.

There are a number of different types of massage, each involving specific practices and goals. Some of the most common massage methods are:

- **Swedish massage**. Sometimes referred to as classic massage, a Swedish massage aims to relax the muscles and improve circulation by kneading, rubbing, and tapping affected areas.
- **Manipulation**. This approach to massage involves not only rubbing, but also stretching and moving ligaments, tendons, and muscles in order to improve mobility.
- **Deep Tissue Massage**. A deep tissue massage can sometimes be painful because the muscles are massaged using hard pressure, with the goal of relieving tension.
- **Trigger Point Therapy**. This type of massage focuses on trigger points, which are tense spots in the muscles.
- **Reflexology**. This type of massage focuses on specific 'reflex zones' on your feet. This type of massage relieves tension and pain and improves circulation in the areas of your body that corresponds to the reflex zones of the feet.
- **Aromatherapy**. This massage has a smooth and flowing style. It focuses on overall relaxation, circulation, and range of motion and relieves muscle tension. Different oils can be used that may promote sleep and relaxation.



Massage is a smart, healthy and drug-free option that has helped many people overcome insomnia. Because melatonin influences the sleep stage of an individual's circadian rhythm; a natural way of boosting it (indirectly by increasing serotonin) through massage may have a positive influence on your sleep. The easiest way to use these hormones to get a good night's sleep is to increase your melatonin levels at night and boost your serotonin levels the next morning. And how do I do this you may ask? To boost your melatonin at night, just dim the lights in the evening and avoid the bright screen of a television, smartphone or laptop for a while before bed. Meditation and deep breathing exercises are also considered to be a good pre-bedtime activity to help you wind down. And the next day it's all about letting in the light. Boost your serotonin levels by opening the curtains and letting in as much sunlight as possible. Better yet, get outside into the open air, exercise and book a massage.

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