

Best of both worlds

Jennifer Wayte, president of the Federation of Holistic Therapists and a complementary therapy practitioner and trainer, provides an introduction to massage



mood, relieves pain, and promotes relaxation, it is suggested that massage stimulates the release of certain chemicals in the body, such as serotonin (mood enhancing) and endorphins (reduce pain perception). An increasing body of research over the years has demonstrated that massage has many beneficial effects on health and wellbeing. Most major charities that support people with chronic and/or life-threatening conditions also provide massage via a complementary therapy service, to help their service users manage their symptoms and cope with a wide range of emotional, physical and mental challenges.

Additional treatment benefits

It is important to note that 'treatment-specific' benefits aside, there are other benefits to complementary therapies such as massage, that are harder to 'measure' from a research point of view – most of which are linked to the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and client. These might include:

- **Continuity** – clients will receive a full consultation, followed by regular treatments/support from the same professional, often lasting an hour. Many clients appreciate this one-to-one support, particularly as appointments with medical professionals – through no fault of their own – are often time-restricted and focus on one presenting symptom/condition
- **Empathy** – massage therapists are empathetic in their approach, are non-judgemental and fully focused on helping to support the health and wellbeing of their clients. While they are not counsellors (unless appropriately trained in this therapy) they are excellent listeners and can often signpost their clients to other professionals and resources that may be of benefit
- **Holistic** – therapists providing massage

Patients can visit www.fht.org.uk/register to find a registered and insured massage therapist in their area. If you wish to display a poster or flyers in your practice, signposting patients to the Accredited Register, visit www.fht.org.uk/GPresources



Jennifer Wayte is president of the Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT), the UK and Ireland's leading professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists. She has been a complementary therapist for more than 23 years and is influential in the development of therapy standards and regulation. For more information about the FHT, visit www.fht.org.uk

treatments take a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. Rather than focusing on or 'treating' a specific condition, they take a more client-centred approach. In other words, they aim to support the whole person, taking into account their full medical history and all of their presenting symptoms and concerns, as well as lifestyle factors. Many massage therapists will also pass on aftercare advice and self-help techniques to their clients.

As part of a client's first treatment, they will receive a full consultation, during which the massage therapist will ask a range of questions about that client's health, diet and lifestyle. In some instances (and unless referred), the massage therapist may ask the client to obtain permission from their GP to go ahead with treatment – for instance, if the client is currently on medication, or has a condition such as diabetes. This is to help ensure that massage will in no way adversely impact the client's health.

Where to find a massage therapist?

Massage therapists are not statutory regulated. However, if looking for a massage therapist, you may wish to signpost patients to an Accredited Register (AR) – such as the FHT Complementary Healthcare Therapist Register. This register has been independently approved by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care, a body accountable to parliament. The FHT's Register currently lists more than 10,000 practitioners, throughout the UK, offering up to 19 different complementary therapies, including body massage.

References

1. Arthritis Research UK (Jan 2013). *Complementary and alternative therapies*. Published by Arthritis Research UK. To access the report: <http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/complementary-and-alternative-medicines/complementary-therapies.aspx>
2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (May 2009). NICE guidelines: low back pain. Published by NICE. To access the guidelines: <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg88/resources/guidance-low-back-pain-pdf>
3. Federation of Holistic Therapists (Oct 2011). An appointment with Dr Dixon, *International Therapist* 98: 42-43.

Massage in practice

- Arthritis: a report published by Arthritis Research UK¹, shows that massage may ease pain and improve mobility in those affected by osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia and low back pain
- Low back pain: NICE guidelines² recommend a course of manual therapy – including massage – for the early management of persistent non-specific low back pain
- Cancer care, to support both patients and their carers and help them cope with cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship
- Hospices, to improve quality of life and bring comfort to those receiving palliative/end of life care
- Nursing and residential homes, to offer vital 'positive' touch to the elderly (rather just functional, i.e. washing and dressing) and especially those affected by dementia
- The community, to support a wide range of populations, from those recovering from substance misuse, to homeless people and those affected by HIV

On-site complementary therapy on hand

Dr Michael Dixon, chair of NHS Alliance, is a partner and practising GP at Culm Valley Integrated Centre for Health. The Centre has a number of complementary therapists working from dedicated treatment rooms on site. So, when does he refer? Dr Dixon explains: 'In particular, when conventional treatment has no – or incomplete – answers. Back pain and musculoskeletal problems are probably the most common, with these clients often being referred to our osteopath, sports therapist or masseur.

'I refer patients variously to all the therapists at our centre – for manipulation, herbal treatment, homeopathy, acupuncture, massage, reflexology, mind/body approaches, healing and a number of other modalities. It is not only a question of selecting the most appropriate therapy but also, quite often, the personality of the therapist is taken into account.

'Patients also benefit from being given more time than we are able to afford in a conventional medical consultation, and the whole process and "ambience" is often seen as less threatening when having a consultation with a complementary practitioner. The important thing, however, is that we all work together in the centre and patients don't have to choose between the conventional or the complementary, but can access the 'best of both worlds'.³