

Massage Therapy

**An information sheet from the Kentucky Council Against Health Fraud
www.kcahf.org**

Overview

Massage involves various methods for manipulating the soft tissues of the body in order to produce relaxation, relieve pain, or provide other health benefits. While massage may be useful as part of a program of physical therapy, some therapists make claims, or use methods, that are not supported by scientific evidence.

Scientific assessment

Massage may be useful in helping you relax, relieving muscle pain, or making you feel good in general. Reviews have concluded that it can be useful in dealing with back pain. However, it does not increase blood flow to the muscles, remove “toxins,” or influence any disease.

Some practitioners claim to adjust or balance the body’s “energy,” but there is no scientific evidence for any “energy” that can be manipulated in this manner.

For further information, see:

<http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/massage.html>

Recommendations

Massage is a reasonable therapy to use if you enjoy it for its own sake or find it helpful in relieving pain. It may also be prescribed by your physician as a part of physical therapy.

Certain types of massage may be harmful for patients with back problems or with other medical conditions. It is best to check with your physician to see if massage is all right for you.

We recommend that you avoid therapists who claim that they can treat disease, strengthen the immune system, improve breathing, etc. We also recommend that you avoid therapists who claim to balance or align the body’s “energy.”

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Some specific methods which we do *not* recommend are:

- *Craniosacral therapy*, in which practitioners apply pressure to bones of the skulls and claim to remove blockages, adjust the rhythm of cerebrospinal fluid, etc.
- *Polarity therapy*, which is claimed to balance “energy” between positive and negative parts of the body
- *Reiki*, a technique that is claimed to transmit and balance mystical forms of “energy,” sometimes without even touching the body
- *Reflexology*, in which the entire body is thought to be represented in a small part (usually the foot); massage or pressure to a specific location is thought to benefit the corresponding organ
- *Therapeutic touch* (or *healing touch*), in which waving motions of the hands are used to remove congestion and bring about balance in the “energy field.” Usually the practitioner does not even touch the body. (See our separate handout on therapeutic touch.)

All of these methods are contrary to scientific knowledge concerning the workings of the human body, and there is no evidence that they are useful (except through the placebo effect).

Recommendations of KCAHF are based on our assessments of the scientific literature concerning unconventional approaches to health care. For specific recommendations concerning your medical condition, consult your physician.

For further information, contact KCAHF, 7605 Devondale Ct., Louisville, KY 40222 or send e-mail to: tjwheeler@louisville.edu