

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Massage - Hands on Relief for Arthritis Pain

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.

Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Patients ask us all the time about massage therapy usually in connection with arthritis symptoms. So here goes with my take on massage as it pertains to arthritis.

The medical community has begun to be aware that hands on therapy can help alleviate symptoms of osteoarthritis in many areas.

Touch

Touch of course is the main ingredient of massage and when done correctly gets the nervous system to relax. The nervous system perceives pain and if you can get the nervous system to relax, the pain can lessen greatly. But it has to be the right type of massage in the right hands. That is the key: right type of massage in the right hands.

Why does it work?

Arthritic joints are pretty smart. They sense pain and instability through little nerve endings in the joints. The surrounding muscles, fascia, and capsule tighten up to help protect the joint. Adhesions can form to restrict movement.

- Massage can loosen up these tissues and separate adhesions that restrict movement.
- Synovial joint fluid may be stimulated to increase by gentle joint stretching massage.
- Endorphins (natural pain killers) are released by massage.
- Massage increases blood flow to affected areas to aid healing.
- Massage can also cure osteoarthritis. Oops! Just wanted to see if you are paying attention!

Sadly, it can't cure arthritis, but it can be effective alone or in conjunction with other medical treatments.

The Right Form

Most patients know only about full-body deep-tissue massage. I don't recommend this for arthritis patients.

Deep massage can create inflammation. It leaves you too sore to move freely and the joints can feel stiffer than before.

More preferable

- Gentle massage
- Touch therapy such as Reiki
- Neuromuscular therapy for tone and length of muscles
- Myofascial release to improve range of motion
- Self massage techniques taught to the patient

What You Want

You need a certified massage therapist experienced in treating arthritis patients. Ask.

Be sure your massage therapist knows if you are taking narcotics that blunt your sensitivity to pressure.

If you are taking any blood thinner (Coumadin and others) you are at risk of bruising from massage.

If you are going to physical therapy, the massage therapist has to work in cooperation with the physical therapist.

Massage therapy for arthritis works best and gives longer relief if done regularly for three to four weeks and then can be scaled back. Some insurances cover massage if prescribed by a physician.

Massage Therapists are licensed through the American Massage Therapy Association. Visit www.amtamassage.org.

Information about all the Orthopaedic Surgery and musculoskeletal conditions I treat in the office and hospital can be found by going to our teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which can take you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

I am in the process of re-designing the website, which I think you will appreciate very much. I'll let you know when it is finished. We are really excited about it.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush